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▲ Mar-a-Lago, Donald Trump's home in south Florida. Photograph: Cristóbal Herrera/EPA

FBI sought national defense documents at Trump's Mar-a-Lago, affidavit shows

Hugo Lowell in New York

The FBI searched Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida this month after speaking to a significant number of witnesses and finding probable cause that national defense information and evidence of obstruction existed at the former president's property, according to newly unsealed court filings on Friday.

The details contained in the affidavit used to secure a warrant to search Mar-a-Lago - partially redacted to protect the ongoing criminal investigation into Trump's unauthorized retention of government secrets - offered the clearest insight yet into the basis for the FBI's seeking permission to search the resort.

"There is probable cause to believe that additional documents that contain

classified NDI or that are presidential records subject to record retention requirements currently remain at the premises. There is also probable cause to believe that evidence of obstruction will be found," it said.

The affidavit made the case that the FBI needed to forcibly retrieve the United States government's most sensitive secrets, especially after it came to suspect Trump and his team were holding on to classified documents despite repeated efforts - including with a subpoena - to secure their return.

Most pressing, according to the affidavit, was that the FBI had identified probable cause that documents containing national defense information were scattered across Mar-a-Lago, potentially jeopardizing intelligence gathering and revealing the identities of human clandestine sources.

The specific mentions of the most

private areas at Mar-a-Lago - for instance Pine Hall, which is not particularly widely known - suggests the FBI had close operational knowledge from a source about where the documents were being kept and potentially being moved around the resort.

While the exact origin of that information appears to have been kept redacted, in an accompanying legal memo explaining its redactions, the justice department revealed for the first time that the FBI had interviewed a "significant number of civilian witnesses" before seeking the warrant.

The affidavit also mentioned an additional significant reason for needing the document to initially be kept under seal: "The FBI has not yet identified all potential criminal confederates and not located all evidence related to its investigation."

In making the case that the FBI

needed to search Mar-a-Lago, the affidavit - produced by an FBI agent working in the bureau's Washington field office - also showed how Trump had previously retained government secrets at Mar-a-Lago after he was no longer president.

The FBI noted that after Trump finally returned around a dozen boxes of materials to the National Archives this year, an FBI triage found 184 unique classified documents, including 25 marked top secret, 92 marked secret, 67 marked confidential, and some with Trump's distinctive handwriting.

The documents also included some with markings like "SI" for special intelligence, "HCS" for intelligence from human clandestine sources, "NOFORN", for "Not Releasable to Foreign Nationals", "FISA" for the "Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act", and "ORCON", which restricts non-US dissemination.

"Of most significant concern was that highly classified records were unfolded, intermixed with other records, and otherwise improperly [sic] identified," it warned.

According to the affidavit, the FBI essentially concluded that Mar-a-Lago was the scene of potential violations of the Espionage Act, obstruction of justice, and a statute that criminalizes the unauthorized removal or retention of government records more generally.

The affidavit became public after federal Judge Bruce Reinhart, who approved the warrant and is overseeing the case, ordered the justice department to submit the redacted version before noon, leading to a tense and breathless wait for the court in West Palm Beach to unseal the documents.

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Trump was unhappy about the affidavit. In a statement on his social media website, Trump, in strident language that is typical to him, blasted the release of the document. He called it a “total public relations subterfuge” by the FBI and the justice department and

accused the judge of having personal animosity towards him. “WITCH HUNT!!!!” the former president said in a subsequent post, using one of the most common phrases Trump deploys in order to portray himself as the victim of a hostile conspiracy. The partial release of the affidavit is a significant juncture for the justice

department, which had opposed unsealing any part of the affidavit until it was overruled by Reinhart, and the attorney general, Merrick Garland, who personally approved the warrant after days of deliberations. The justice department had originally opposed unsealing the affidavit at all and filed a redacted version only after being forced by Reinhart last

week. Trump had indicated previously that he had supported unsealing the affidavit but his lawyers never filed a formal motion to that effect, instead leaving the effort to a coalition of media outlets that pushed to have the affidavit become public. Trump has since filed a separate motion to have a so-called special

master appointed to determine what seized materials prosecutors can use as evidence in the investigation. The motion also aims to force the justice department to provide a more detailed list of what was retrieved by the FBI.

Dow plunges 1,000 points after Fed chief Powell warns of inflation ‘pain’

Dominic Rushe in New York

US stock markets nosedived on Friday after Federal Reserve chair, Jerome Powell, warned of “pain” ahead as the central bank struggles to bring down inflation from a 40-year high. Powell’s highly anticipated speech was more hawkish than had been expected, with the Fed chair pledging to do all he could to end rising prices. The Dow Jones Industrial Average lost just over 1,000 points, 3%, the S&P fell 3.3% and the Nasdaq dropped almost 4%. Speaking at the Kansas City Fed’s annual meeting of the world’s central bankers in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, Powell said the Fed’s “overarching focus right now is to bring inflation back down”. The Federal Reserve has been raising interest rates rapidly in an attempt to slow inflation. Powell said the Fed would continue to use its tools “forcefully” until prices were under control. “We must keep at it until the job is done,” said Powell. Powell warned there would be consequences to these actions, namely job losses and slower growth. “While higher interest rates, slower growth and softer labor market conditions will bring down inflation, they will also bring some pain to households and businesses. These are the unfortunate



▲ Jerome Powell at the symposium in Jackson Hole, Wyoming on Friday. Photograph: Amber Baesler/AP

costs of reducing inflation. But a failure to restore price stability would mean far greater pain,” he said. “These are the unfortunate costs of reducing inflation,” he added. The Fed was slow to react to rising inflation. At last year’s meeting, Powell dismissed rising prices as a “transitory” phase triggered by supply chain problems related to the coronavirus pandemic.

But as prices have risen at rates unseen since the 1980s the Fed has moved to hike interest rates aggressively and is all but guaranteed to do so again when its committee meets again in September. At each of its last two meetings the Fed has increased its benchmark federal funds rate by 0.75 percentage points, to a range between 2.25% and 2.5%, the most rapid rate of increase

since the early 1990s. There are signs that the rate of price rises is slowing in the US. Gas prices have fallen markedly and on Friday the commerce department announced that the central bank’s preferred measure of inflation – the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) index – slowed in July to an annual rate of 6.3%, down from 6.8% in June. But the rate of inflation remains far above the Fed’s target

rate of 2%. Powell made clear that the recent good news was unlikely to sway the Fed from its course. “While the lower inflation readings for July are welcome, a single month’s improvement falls far short of what the committee will need to see before we are confident that inflation is moving down,” he said. Central bankers across the world are struggling with similar issues. In the UK economists have predicted inflation will hit 18% in 2023 and millions of households face an 80% energy bill rise from 1 October. China could miss its annual growth target for the first time since 2015 as factory activity falls and the property market faces a crisis. By comparison, parts of the US economy remain strong, notably consumer spending and the jobs market, where unemployment is at a 50-year low. But Powell emphasized that tackling inflation was now the Fed’s top priority. “Our responsibility to deliver price stability is unconditional,” said Powell. “It is true that high inflation is a global phenomenon, and that many economies around the world face inflation as high or higher than seen here in the United States,” but said that did not diminish the Fed’s “responsibility to carry out our assigned task of achieving price stability”.

Revealed: leaked video shows Amy Coney Barrett’s secretive faith group drove women to tears

Stephanie Kirchgaessner

The People of Praise, a secretive Christian faith group that counts the conservative supreme court justice Amy Coney Barrett as a member, considered women’s obedience and subservience to men as one of its central early teachings, according to leaked remarks and writings of the wife of one of the group’s founders. A leaked video of a recent private People of Praise event, marking its 50th anniversary, shows Dorothy Ranaghan explaining how some female followers of the faith group cried intensely in reaction to the group’s early teachings on “headship” and the “roles of men and women”, in which men are considered

divinely ordained as the “head” of the family and dominant to women. Asked in an interview during the anniversary event about the years after the group’s members first made a “covenant” to join People of Praise in the early 1970s, Dorothy Ranaghan said: “Some of the women – who are still in my women’s group, as a matter of fact – were wearing sunglasses all the time, because they were always crying and would have to hold on to their chairs every time somebody started teaching, because ‘What are we going to hear this time?’” She then added, as the audience and her interviewer laughed: “But it all worked out just fine in the end.” The comment marks the first time a statement about some women’s nega-

tive early responses to “headship” teachings has been published. The leaked footage was shared with the Guardian by a source who asked to remain anonymous. Former members of People of Praise, many of whom are critical of the group’s dominance over members’ lives, have described the group as calling for complete obedience of women to their husbands. The Guardian has previously reported that one of the group’s former members described in a sworn affidavit filed in the 1990s that Kevin Ranaghan – a group co-founder and Dorothy’s husband – exerted almost total control over the former member when she was living in the couple’s household, including making all decisions about

her finances and dating relationships. The group also embraces traditions like encouraging members to speak in tongues, and performing exorcisms. Barrett, who lived in the Ranaghan household while she attended law school at Notre Dame, has never publicly disclosed or discussed her membership in the Christian charismatic sect, where her father had a leadership role and where she previously served as a “handmaid”. Barrett has said she is a “faithful Catholic” whose religious beliefs would not “bear in the discharge of my duties as a judge”. But while Barrett’s personal faith-based opposition to abortion rights and Roe v Wade were known before her 2020 confirmation and before she

joined a majority of justices in overturning the landmark ruling that protected abortion rights nationally, less is known about the culture in which Barrett was raised and its views on women and childbirth, suffering, and their role in society. Barrett has never addressed how the reversal of Roe might affect a woman’s life. But during oral argument in Dobbs v Jackson, the supreme court case that ultimately overturned Roe, Barrett referred specifically in questions to the availability of so-called “safe haven” laws across the US, which allow mothers to abandon newborns in designated locations without the risk of punishment.

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Barrett suggested that the availability of such legal protections for new mothers meant that while women might be forced to give birth if Roe were overturned, they would not necessarily be forced to become parents, or be burdened by parenthood.

The line of reasoning was decried as “cruel and dangerous” by pro-choice activists and writers, who said that seeing safe haven laws as a viable replacement for reproductive choice ignored real health risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth, and ignored women’s rights to bodily autonomy.

Barrett’s question also appears to echo the People of Praise culture in which she was raised and has chosen to remain a part of, which emphasizes the importance of childbirth, pregnancy and the abandonment of autonomy and privacy it supposedly entails, as a core part of what it means to be a woman.

In her early writings, Dorothy Ranaghan emphasized the need for women to be “self-giving, responsible and reserved”. In a 1978 article that appeared in *New Covenant* magazine, called “Fully a Woman”, child-bearing is described as a “central reality of womanhood” that “determines our presence in the world”, even for those who “by chance or choice” did not have children.

“The child in the womb expands the mother’s body, changing its dimensions. As her body yields, so do the



▲ Amy Coney Barrett, who was successfully nominated to the supreme court by Donald Trump. Photograph: Reuters

borders of privacy and selfishness. Her very existence gives to another.” Women who are most admired, she wrote, “are not private persons, but are surrendered and available to care for others”.

“Pregnancy teaches a woman that others have a claim on her very person for the service of life. Rather than annihilating her, pregnancy makes her a new person, radiant and strong: a mother,” she wrote.

Once women gave birth in the People of Praise, work to care for them is divided on gender lines, according to

Adrian Reimers, a Catholic theological critic and early member of the People of Praise who was dismissed in 1985 and wrote about his experience.

Reimers’ book critiquing the group, called *Not Reliable Guides*, states that men in People of Praise “were quietly taught by their heads and leaders not to change or rinse out diapers” and that women’s emotions were “distrusted”. Pastoral problems were often addressed by asking a woman where she was in her menstrual cycle.

Women, Reimers wrote, played a “decidedly secondary role to men” and

a married woman was “expected always to reflect the fact that she is under her husband’s authority” and under his pastoral care. A guide on the group’s approach to outreach in the Caribbean, Reimers said, explicitly stated: “We should probably deal with the Caribbean matriarchal system by quietly developing an alternate rather than encouraging a confrontation.”

Reimers has written that he believed that the People of Praise’s views on women were rooted not in the Catholic tradition, but rather in Kevin Ranaghan’s involvement in the 1970s

National Men’s Shepherds Conference, which was co-sponsored by Protestant leaders and believed that men were ordained by God to lead.

“It is no surprise that all these communities see feminism as one of the principle [sic] ideological evils of our time,” Reimers wrote.

In a statement released after publication of this article, Dorothy Ranaghan said: “My remarks were meant as a joke as most of the people in the room understood. I would never be part of a group that oppresses women and I never have been part of one. But I have been proud to be one of the women leaders in the People of Praise for more than 50 years.”

She added: “I’ve been in the company of many strong women – lawyers, doctors, educators, businesswomen, wives and mothers, and we are in no way oppressed or dominated. We are responsible for our own decisions; we are free and happy. Furthermore, it is unconscionable to me that any of the more than 40 men and women who have lived with our family over the years would consider my husband an oppressor. As those who know him would agree, he is a kind, gentle man who listens carefully and respects the opinions of women and men and he always has.”

Barrett did not respond to a request for comment.

Mississippi’s Jim Crow-era felony voting law is constitutional, federal court rules

Sam Levine in New York

A Jim Crow-era provision of the Mississippi constitution designed to disenfranchise Black voters is constitutional, a federal appellate court ruled on Wednesday.

The case deals with a provision of the Mississippi constitution, Section 241, that lays out specific crimes that cause its citizens to permanently lose the right to vote. Mississippi officials initially adopted the provision at a constitutional convention in 1890, choosing crimes such as theft, arson, embezzlement and bigamy that they believed African Americans were more likely to commit. “We came here to exclude the Negro,” said the convention’s president. “Nothing short of this will answer.”

A majority of judges on the US court of appeals for the fifth circuit did not dispute that the original provision was racist and unconstitutional. But they said Mississippi had since “cleansed” the provision of its “discriminatory taint” by tweaking the provision twice in the 20th century. Voters removed burglary from the list of disenfranchising crimes in 1950 and added murder and rape to the list in 1968.

“Plaintiffs failed to meet their burden of showing that the current version of Section 241 was motivated by discriminatory intent. In addition, Mississippi has conclusively shown that any taint associated with Section 241 has been cured,” a majority of justices for the fifth circuit, one of the most conservative in the US, wrote in



▲ Empty poll kiosks await voters at the Mississippi second congressional district primary election precinct on 7 June in Jackson, Mississippi. Photograph: Rogelio V Solis/AP

an opinion.

The challengers in the case have said they plan to appeal the ruling to the US supreme court.

The decision will allow Mississippi to continue to enforce an extremely harsh policy when it comes to voting rights for those with certain felony convictions. Ten per cent of the state’s voting age population – the highest rate in the country – cannot vote because of a felony conviction, according to an estimate by the Sentencing Project, a criminal justice non-profit. That includes 16% of the Black voting age

population. The vast majority of people disenfranchised in the state have completed their criminal sentence.

It is technically possible for someone with a disenfranchising crime on their record to get their voting rights back, but the state makes it nearly impossible. To do so, a person with a felony conviction must get both houses of the state legislature to approve an individualized bill on their behalf by at least a two-thirds majority. The bill must then be approved by the governor. Hardly anyone has succeeded.

It’s a policy that prevents people

like Roy Harness, one of the lead plaintiffs in the case, from voting.

Harness, a Black army veteran in his late 60s, cashed a series of bad checks in the 1980s and was convicted of forgery. He spent two years in prison and in recent years has focused on his education. He got a bachelor’s degree at 63 and a master’s degree in 2019. “It makes me feel bad. I’ve served my country, nation ... got a degree and [I] still can’t vote, no matter what you do to prove yourself,” he told the Guardian earlier this year.

In a dissenting opinion, Judge

James Graves said the tweaks in the 20th century did not cure the discrimination of the original provision.

“The 1968 vote reflects the voters’ views only on the addition or subtraction of three crimes in the original § 241 list. Those votes did not touch, in any way, the eight original crimes from 1890 that remain in § 241 to this day,” he wrote.

Graves, who is Black, also said the majority had glossed over the blatant racial discrimination that continued to exist in Mississippi when the amendments were adopted, and discussed that history in unusually personal terms for a judicial opinion.

“Recounting Mississippi’s history forces me to relive my experiences growing up in the Jim Crow era. While I do not rely on those experiences in deciding this case, I would be less than candid if I did not admit that I recall them. Vividly,” he wrote.

He wrote about seeing a cross burned on his grandmother’s lawn in Mississippi in 1963, and seeing the best Black teachers transferred away from his school after courts ordered desegregation. He also wrote about the lasting presence of the Confederate emblem on the Mississippi flag, which sat beside him on the bench in the courts where he has served.

“No matter where I went, the 1894 flag was already there – a haunting reminder that a wrong never righted touches us all,” he wrote.

Sullivan Walter freed after 36 years for New Orleans rape he didn't commit

Edwin Rios in New York and agencies

Sullivan Walter was just a teenager when he was arrested in connection with a rape during a home invasion in New Orleans.

More than three decades later, a Louisiana judge determined Walter, now 53, was wrongfully convicted for a crime he didn't commit and freed him from prison on Thursday.

The decision by district judge Darryl Derbigny ended the fifth longest wrongful conviction sentence of any juvenile in the US, Nola.com reported, at a time when juvenile sentences, particularly life sentences, are under scrutiny.

The Black man's conviction illustrated the racial bias that plagues the US criminal justice system and has led Black people to be disproportionately wrongfully convicted of sexual assault, murder and drug-related offenses compared with white people.

A 2017 review of nearly 2,000 cases between 1989 and 2016 by the National Registry of Exonerations found that Black people were significantly more likely to later be found innocent after a conviction.

They were also more likely to wait longer for their names to be cleared. In Walter's case, like others, race played a role, the Innocence Project New Orleans legal director, Richard Davis, said in a statement to the Associated Press.



▲ Sullivan Walter, 53, with, left to right, his brothers Joseph Walter and Byron Walter Sr, and Innocence Project New Orleans legal director Richard Davis. Photograph: Travis Spradling/AP

"The lawyers and law enforcement involved acted as if they believed that they could do what they chose to a Black teenager from a poor family and would never be scrutinized or held to account," Davis said. "This is not just about individuals and their choices, but the systems that let them happen."

Walter's exoneration came after the office of New Orleans' district attorney, Jason Williams, a reformist prosecutor recently acquitted of tax fraud, worked with the Innocence Project New Or-

leans, which investigates wrongful convictions, to file a motion to vacate Walter's sentence, noting that there were "red flags" throughout the investigation that led to his conviction.

In 1986, Walter, who was 17 at the time, had been arrested for a separate burglary when his photo was added to a lineup presented to a woman, identified only as LS, who was raped that May by a man at her New Orleans home, who also threatened to harm her eight-year-old son.

The woman identified Walter in a photo array. That served as the sole evidence presented at trial that connected Walter to the incident.

Emily Maw, an attorney who works for the district attorney's office, noted in court "some red flags that the eyewitness testimony could well have been unreliable", the AP reported.

Prosecutors at the time of the incident failed to show evidence that the seminal fluid matched Walter's blood. Walter's previous attorneys also failed

to challenge "conflicting statements" made by police officers who investigated the woman's case.

Following a single-day trial, a judge sentenced Walter to 39 years in prison on rape charges and for an aggravated burglary separate from the case, Nola.com reported.

"In this case, LS was being asked to make a cross-racial identification of someone who at all the times that she could observe him was either masked, in an unlit room at night, and/or threatening her not to look at him," a joint filing by New Orleans prosecutors and the Innocence Project noted, and the Associated Press reported. "In addition, LS was not shown a photo array containing Mr Walter until over six weeks after the crime," it added.

From the courtroom on Thursday, Walter brushed the tears from his eyes as he learned of his impending release.

"This is horrible," the judge, Derbigny, said as he learned what unfolded. "I'm at a loss of words to express the sorrow and the anger I have at the treatment you've been dealt by the system."

After his release from Elayn Hunt correctional center, following an embrace from his two older brothers, Walter told reporters he was "ready to live".

"I just want to live an honest, free life," Walter said.

Pakistan declares emergency as floods hit over 30 million people

Shah Meer Baloch and agencies

Heavy rain has pounded large areas of Pakistan as the government declared an emergency to deal with monsoon flooding it said had affected more than 30 million people.

The annual monsoon is essential for irrigating crops and replenishing lakes and dams across the Indian subcontinent, but each year it also brings a wave of destruction.

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) said on Friday that more than 900 people had been killed this year - including 34 in the previous 24 hours - as a result of the monsoon rains that began in June.

Officials say this year's floods are comparable to 2010 - the worst on record - when more than 2,000 people died and nearly a fifth of the country was underwater.

"I have never seen such huge flooding because of rains in my life," an octogenarian farmer, Rahim Bakhsh Brohi, told Agence France-Presse near Sukkur, in the southern Sindh province.

Like thousands of others in rural Pakistan, Brohi was seeking shelter next to a national highway, as the elevated roads are among the few dry places to be found.



▲ Tents set up for displaced people in Sindh province. Photograph: Asif Hassan/AFP/Getty Images

A statement on Friday from the office of the prime minister, Shehbaz Sharif, said 33 million people had been "badly affected" by the flooding, while the country's disaster agency said nearly 220,000 homes were destroyed and half a million more badly damaged.

The disaster agency for Sindh province said 800,000 hectares (2 million

acres) of cultivated crops had been wiped out there alone, where many farmers live hand to mouth and season to season.

"My cotton crop that was sown on 50 acres of land is all gone," Nasrullah Mehar told AFP. "It's a huge loss for me ... What can be done?"

The climate change minister, Sherry

Rehman, who on Wednesday called the floods "a catastrophe of epic scale", said the government had declared an emergency, and appealed for international assistance.

Pakistan is eighth on the Long-term Global Climate Risk Index, a list compiled by the environmental NGO Germanwatch of countries deemed

most vulnerable to extreme weather.

Earlier this year, much of Pakistan was in the grip of a drought and heat-wave, with temperatures hitting 51C (124F) in Jacobabad, Sindh province.

The city is grappling with floods that have inundated homes and swept away roads and bridges.

In Sukkur, about 50 miles (75km) away, residents struggled to make their way along muddy streets clogged with flood-borne debris.

"If you had come earlier, the water was this high," 24-year-old student Aqeel Ahmed told AFP, raising his hand to his chest.

Sharif cancelled a planned trip to the UK in order to oversee the flood response, and ordered the army to throw every resource into relief operations.

"I have seen from the air and the devastation can't be expressed in words," he said on state TV after visiting Sukkur.

"The towns, villages and crops are inundated by the water. I don't think this level of destruction has taken place before."

A national fundraising appeal has been launched, with Pakistan's military saying every commissioned officer will donate a month's salary towards it.

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Almost all of Pakistan has suffered this year, but the worst-hit areas are Balochistan and Sindh in the south and west.

Both provinces have experienced the most disastrous monsoon spell in six decades, respectively recording 522% and 469% more than an average downpour this year.

Heavy rain has washed away people, roads, bridges and livestock. Balochistan's railway connection has

also been suspended with other parts of Pakistan after a major bridge built by the British government in 1885 collapsed in March, about 35 miles (56km) away from the provincial capital, Quetta.

Quetta witnessed heavy rains for more than 24 hours that ended on Friday at 2pm local time. The provincial capital saw the worst flood in last 24 hours and water coming to people's homes, causing casualties and heavy damages to masses and properties.

The relief and rescue operations are

ongoing. Deputy commissioner Shai-hak Baloch, leading the relief and rescue operation, told the Guardian from the site: "We are on relief and rescue operations. We have not assessed casualties and damages yet."

"As Quetta city has a valley, the flood water has come from the nearby mountains and unprecedented rain in the city has brought urban flooding. We are working hard to rescue people."

"We are witnessing the worst flood in Balochistan and many parts of the province have become inaccessible due

to destruction of roads and bridges."

Images were circulating on social media on Friday of swollen rivers obliterating buildings and bridges along their banks in the mountainous north.

Junaid Khan, deputy commissioner of Swat district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, told AFP that 14 riverside hotels had been swept away, along with two small hydropower stations.

In Chaman, a western frontier town neighbouring Afghanistan, travellers had to wade through waist-high water to cross the border after a nearby dam

burst, adding to the deluge brought by rain.

Pakistan Railways said nearby Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province, had been cut off and train services suspended after a key bridge was damaged by a flash flood.

Most mobile networks and internet services were down in the province, with the country's telecoms authority calling it "unprecedented".

Washington state to ban sales of new gas cars by 2035, following California

Guardian staff and agencies

Washington state will follow California and prohibit the sale of new gas-powered vehicles by 2035, Jay Inslee, the state governor, said.

California regulators on Thursday moved forward with a landmark plan to phase out the sale of gas cars over the next 13 years in the US's largest auto market.

The new policy requires 100% of new sales of passenger cars, trucks and SUVs in the state to be powered by electricity or hydrogen by 2035, with one-fifth allowed to be plug-in hybrids.

The specific regulations for Washington state are yet to be created and the public will have the chance to weigh in, the Seattle Times reported.

Transportation-related emissions account for more than 40% of greenhouse gas emissions in Washington.

In 2020, lawmakers in the state passed a law directing the department of ecology to adopt California's emissions standards. This year, they set a goal of phasing out sales of new internal combustion-powered cars by 2030.

A state council, set up by Inslee to plan for the future of electric vehicles, held its first meeting in July. Members discussed building a network of fast-



▲ Traffic between Seattle and the eastern suburbs on a wet and blustery day. Photograph: Ian Dewar/Alamy

charging stations on state highways, said Anna Lising, senior climate adviser to Inslee. The effort will be helped by \$71m from the federal government.

The state legislature also has budgeted \$69m to set up "community charging" stations for people who don't live in single-family homes.

Lising said she expected the new

regulations to incentivize manufacturers to make more and cheaper electric vehicles.

Nearly 20% of new vehicle registrations in Washington in July were either electric or hybrid, according to data from the state's department of licensing. In total, 104,000 electric vehicles - either fully battery electric or

a plug-in hybrid electric - are registered in the state, about 2.5 times the total from two years ago.

Massachusetts has also said it will follow California's lead and more states are likely to. New York and Pennsylvania are among 17 states that have adopted some or all of California's tailpipe emission standards, which are

stricter than federal rules.

The policy passed in California on Thursday marks a dramatic step in the fight to reduce emissions and combat the climate emergency.

Implementing the new rules will require significant investments, however. California will need to expand public charging stations to accommodate the surge in electric vehicles.

The Alliance for Automotive Innovation, which represents many large carmakers, said meeting the state's ambitious timeline would be challenging due to the lack of charging infrastructure, access to materials needed for batteries, and supply chain problems.

And even with the new rules, California's transition to electric vehicles will take time as gas-powered cars will outnumber zero-emission vehicles for years.

In Washington, the Republican representative Andy Barkis, ranking member of the state house of representatives' transportation committee, said he felt the push to ban internal combustion engines would hurt both manufacturers and consumers.

"I believe the market is best to continue to determine how we transition," he said.

Socialite who charmed Nato staff in Naples was Russian spy, say investigators

Shaun Walker

A team of investigators claim to have unmasked a deep-cover spy from Russia's military intelligence agency, the GRU, who spent a decade posing as a Latin American jewellery designer and partied with Nato staff based in Naples.

The investigators say the woman went by the name of Maria Adela Kuhfeldt Rivera, and told people she met that she was the child of a German father and Peruvian mother, born in the city of Callao, Peru.

In fact, she was a career GRU officer from Russia, according to research by Bellingcat in partnership with a number of media outlets including La Repubblica in Italy and Der Spiegel in Germany, and shared with the Guardian



▲ Investigators say the woman, who went by the name of Maria Adela Kuhfeldt Rivera, led an active social life in Naples, where she befriended Nato staff. Photograph: Supplied by Bellingcat

before publication.

"Rivera" was what the intelligence community call an illegal, a deep-

cover agent trained to pose as a foreigner. Moscow's intelligence agencies have used illegals since the early Soviet

period. Sometimes, they stay living in their fake identities for decades.

Posing as "Rivera", the illegal moved between Rome, Malta and Paris, eventually settling in Naples, home of Nato's Allied Joint Force Command, around 2013. She set up a jewellery boutique called Serein and led an active social life.

Her acquaintances said that by taking on the role of secretary at the Naples branch of the international Lions Club, she was able to befriend many Nato staff and other affiliates. One Nato employee told the investigators that he had a brief romantic relationship with "Rivera".

Traditionally, illegals have been extremely hard for counterintelligence agencies to find, but in a world of biometric data, facial recognition software and open source investigation possi-



▲ 'Rivera' (pictured right) took a one-way flight to Moscow the day after Bellingcat published a joint article suggesting the 2018 Salisbury novichok poisoning suspects were GRU operatives. Photograph: Supplied by Bellingcat

bilities, it has become harder for Russia to keep its illegals below the radar.

Christo Grozev, Bellingcat's CEO and lead investigator, said in an interview that he had first found the trail of

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a possible GRU illegal when he was looking at a leaked database of border crossings logged by Belarusian border guards and provided by a group of hackers in opposition to the regime of Alexander Lukashenko.

Grozev searched for Russian passport numbers in ranges known to have been used by GRU operatives, and found numerous hits. Most had Russian names, but one stood out: Maria Adela Kuhfeldt Rivera.

Looking more closely at “Rivera”, Grozev found that she travelled on several Russian passports with serial numbers in a range used by other known GRU operatives, including an officer who had been indicted for the alleged

novichok poisoning of the Bulgarian arms dealer Emilian Gebrev, and another GRU officer reportedly involved in the attack on Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury in 2018.

He also discovered that on 15 September 2018, “Rivera” bought a ticket from Naples to Moscow. The previous day, Bellingcat and its Russian investigative partner, the Insider, published an article on the two Salisbury poisoners, who travelled under the cover identities Ruslan Boshirov and Alexander Petrov, noting irregularities in their passport data suggesting they had security services links.

It seems “Rivera” was withdrawn by her bosses, who feared that other operatives with similar passport numbers could be compromised. She does

not appear to have left Russia again.

Two months after her sudden departure from Naples, she posted a Facebook status in Italian, apparently as a way of explaining her disappearance and silence.

“It’s the truth I must finally reveal ... Hair is growing now after chemo, very short but it’s there. I miss everything, but I’m trying to breathe,” she wrote.

Some GRU illegals only travel abroad for quick, short-term missions and change identities regularly, while others like “Rivera” spend years inhabiting the same cover identity.

In June, the Netherlands deported a man arriving on a Brazilian passport in the name of Viktor Muller Ferreira, accusing him of being a Russian illegal named Sergey Vladimirovich

Cherkasov. He had apparently spent a decade preparing his identity, including stints studying in Ireland and the US, and was suspected of trying to infiltrate the international criminal court in The Hague.

The unusual thing about “Rivera” is that she travelled on a Russian passport, when usually illegals disguise their links to Russia or the Soviet Union. It seems that an earlier attempt to pass off “Rivera” as a Peruvian citizen failed: an official Peruvian document from 2006 notes that her application for citizenship was rejected as fraudulent.

Apparently, unfazed by the setback, the GRU then relaunched the “Kuhfeldt Rivera” identity with a Russian passport. This was a strange decision, but it

is possible she had already made valuable contacts under that identity and did not want to lose them.

Numerous people who had met “Kuhfeldt Rivera” said she told them her Peruvian mother had taken her to the Soviet Union in 1980 and left her there. She had apparently tried various routes to gain a western European passport over the years.

Bellingcat said it had identified the real Russian woman behind the fake “Rivera” persona, based on information and photo matching from various databases and open source research. She did not reply to requests for comment from the Guardian.

Louisiana woman denied abortion despite fetus’s fatal abnormality to travel to North Carolina

Ramon Antonio Vargas in New Orleans

An expectant Louisiana woman who is carrying a skull-less fetus that would die almost immediately after birth has cemented plans to travel to North Carolina to terminate her pregnancy, she said on Friday.

Nancy Davis, 36, has been facing a choice of either carrying the fetus to term or traveling several states away for an abortion after she says her local medical provider would not perform the procedure amid confusion over whether the state’s abortion ban outlawed it.

Standing on the steps of Louisiana’s capitol building in her home town of Baton Rouge, Davis announced that her trip would be next week. The trip is being financed by more than \$30,000 in donations raised by an online GoFundMe campaign that was launched after she went public with her plight earlier this month.

Her lawyer, the prominent civil rights attorney Ben Crump, also called on Louisiana’s lawmakers to at least clarify the wording of their abortion ban – or to repeal it altogether – to prevent anyone else there from enduring what Davis and her family had during the last several weeks. He said the state’s governor, John Bel Edwards, should call a special legislative session in advance of the regular one scheduled to begin in April of next year to do that if necessary.

“Louisiana lawmakers inflicted unspeakable pain, emotional damage and physical risk upon this beautiful mother,” Crump said, gesturing at



▲ ‘Basically, they said I had to carry my baby to bury my baby,’ Davis remarked. Photograph: WAFB New Orleans

Davis, who was accompanied Friday by her partner, Shedric Cole, their young daughter and her two stepchildren. “They replaced care with confusion, privacy with politics and options with ideology.

“Ms Davis was among the first women to be caught in this crosshairs of confusion due to Louisiana’s rush to restrict abortion. But she will hardly be the last.”

Louisiana is among the American states that have outlawed abortion with very few exceptions following the US supreme court’s decision in June to strip away nationwide abortion rights that had been in place since the 1973 ruling in Roe v Wade.

Davis was about 10 weeks preg-

nant in late July when an ultrasound at Woman’s hospital in Baton Rouge revealed that her fetus was missing the top of its skull, a rare but devastating condition known as acrania that kills babies within days – if not minutes – of birth.

Because Louisiana’s list of conditions justifying an exception from the state’s abortion ban did not explicitly include acrania, hospital officials turned down terminating Davis’ pregnancy, apparently fearing they could be subject to prison time, costly fines and forfeiture of their operating licenses if they performed the procedure.

“Basically, they said I had to carry my baby to bury my baby,” Davis remarked Friday.

Her providers said her Medicaid insurance would not cover the procedure anyway and directed her to an abortion clinic.

Yet Louisiana’s abortion clinics have announced plans to leave the state amid brewing legal battles over whether the ban can constitutionally be enforced.

After Davis went public with her story and retained Crump to help her sort out her options, the state senator who authored Louisiana’s abortion ban, Katrina Jackson, has insisted that Woman’s hospital could have legally terminated Davis’s pregnancy. The statute contains a general exception for fetuses that cannot survive outside their mothers’ wombs.

However, Crump said, that exception was clearly not worded in a way that gave Davis’s providers confidence that they could proceed without potentially being heavily penalized.

Davis instead raised money through a GoFundMe that attracted more than 1,000 donors and booked arrangements to travel with Cole, her partner, to North Carolina. That state – more than 900 miles from Baton Rouge – allows abortions up to the 20th week of pregnancy.

“The law in Louisiana is clear as mud,” Crump said. “We’re going to prepare ourselves to go out of state and trust the people who are saying they can perform the termination of the pregnancy safely and without anybody having to risk going to prison.”

Cole on Friday asked the public to imagine what Davis and the rest of her family had experienced since learning of their baby’s fatal diagnosis and being forced to make the decision to head to North Carolina to abort the baby whom the couple had been expecting.

“It’s really complex – it’s really difficult,” Cole said. “From afar, it’s really easy to have an opinion about something ... but you don’t understand how complex it is” until you personally go through it.

Davis, for her part, said: “This is not fair to me, and it should not happen to any other woman.

“Being a mother starts when the baby is inside the womb, not on the outside, [because of] the attachment and everything that comes with it. As a mother, as a parent, it’s my obligation to have my children’s best interests at heart.”

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Monkeypox cases appear to be declining in some large US cities

Guardian staff and agencies

Monkeypox cases in some large US cities appear to be declining, matching trends seen in Europe, and experts are cautiously optimistic the outbreak may have peaked in places hit hardest by the virus.

The optimism comes just as US officials on Friday said there's enough of a supply of monkeypox vaccine available now – though the shots aren't getting to some of the people who need the protection the most.

The World Health Organization said Thursday that monkeypox cases reported globally declined 21% last week, after a month-long trend of rising infections. US cases continued to rise, but some American experts believe cases are starting to decline based largely on immunity from prior infection and behavior changes as awareness of the disease has grown.

That does not mean the disease will be contained, the experts cautioned.

Since late May, the United States has recorded nearly 17,000 monkeypox cases. The outbreak, which so far has reached 80 countries outside Africa, where the virus is endemic, is largely being transmitted among gay and bisexual men.

Monkeypox, which is spread through close contact with an infected individual and the pus-filled sores



▲ Monkeypox cases in some large US cities – such as New York City, San Francisco and Chicago – appear to be declining. Photograph: Brendan McDermid/Reuters

common to the disease, is rarely fatal.

Rollout of Bavarian Nordic's Jynneos vaccine has been slow because of low supplies of the shot, which is also approved to prevent smallpox. But heightened awareness of the risks and increased immunity appear to be slowing the spread.

"It's very likely that the epidemic peaked as of last week," said DrGerardo Chowell, an infectious disease modeler at Georgia State University School of Public Health.

Chowell's latest model, released on Thursday, forecasts a continued slowdown in new infections in the United States over the next four weeks. The

declines may not be enough to extinguish the outbreak, but they should bring infections to "very low levels", he said.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) did not respond to requests for comment about the apparent trend.

Dr Celine Gounder, an infectious disease epidemiologist and an editor-at-large at Kaiser Health News, said she believes behavior change is driving down monkeypox transmission. But she cautioned that "people get fatigued by behavior change" and transmission may go up again, at least "until folks get two doses of the Jynneos vaccine".

For the moment, cases appear to be dropping in some large US cities hardest hit by the outbreak.

New York City's health commissioner, Ashwin Vasan, acknowledged the declining cases in a tweet on Thursday. "We are cautiously optimistic about this data, but will be closely following to ensure it is a sustained trend," Vasan's tweet read.

Likewise, data tracking monkeypox infections in San Francisco and Chicago show cases began dropping over the past few weeks.

Chicago department of public health spokesperson James Scalzitti said the city may be turning a corner but that more data is needed to confirm a downward trend.

There are other signs as well. According to data on the CDC's website, the percentage of positive tests in public health and some commercial labs – an indicator of transmission rates – has fallen sharply, from 55% positive on 16 July to 24% on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, about 10% of monkeypox vaccine doses have been given to Black people, even though they account for one-third of US cases, according to the CDC.

The new numbers come from 17 states and two cities, and they represent the most comprehensive details available on who's been getting the two-dose vaccines. Similar disparities had been reported previously by a few



▲ In San Francisco, a man holds a sign urging for increased access to the monkeypox vaccine during a protest on 18 July. Photograph: Haven Daley/AP

states and cities.

Experts offered several possible explanations for the disparity. It may be related to how and where shots are being offered and publicized. It may be that some Black men don't trust doctors and government public health efforts. Or they may be less willing to identify themselves as a person who is at higher risk of catching the disease.

The gap echoes disparities seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, when certain racial groups were a disproportionately large share of cases but a smaller fraction of the people initially receiving vaccinations, said Yvens Laborde, director of global health education at Ochsner Health in New Orleans.

"If we're not careful, the same thing will happen here" with monkeypox, he said.

Reuters and the Associated Press contributed reporting.

Moderna sues Pfizer and BioNTech over coronavirus vaccine

Reuters

Moderna is suing its US pharmaceutical rival Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech for patent infringement in the development of the first Covid-19 vaccine approved in the United States, alleging they copied technology that Moderna developed years before the pandemic.

The lawsuit, which seeks undetermined monetary damages, was being filed in US district court in Massachusetts and the regional court of Düsseldorf in Germany, Moderna said in a news release on Friday.

"We are filing these lawsuits to protect the innovative mRNA technology platform that we pioneered, invested billions of dollars in creating, and patented during the decade preceding the Covid-19 pandemic," Moderna's chief executive, Stéphane Bancel, said in the statement.

Moderna said its lawsuit was not meant to stop people from getting vaccines.

Moderna Inc, on its own, and the partnership of Pfizer and BioNTech were two of the first groups to develop a vaccine for the coronavirus.

Just a decade old as a company, Moderna, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, had been an innovator in the messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccine tech-



▲ Moderna Inc, on its own, and the partnership of Pfizer and BioNTech were two of the first groups to develop a vaccine for the coronavirus. Photograph: Rogelio V Solis/AP

nology that enabled the unprecedented speed in developing the Covid-19 vaccine after the coronavirus pandemic began in late 2019 and spread around the world.

An approval process that previously took years was completed in months, thanks largely to the breakthrough in mRNA vaccines, which teach human cells how to make a protein that will

trigger an immune response.

Germany-based BioNTech had also been working in this field when it partnered with the US pharma giant Pfizer.

The US Food and Drug Administration granted emergency use authorization for the Covid-19 vaccine first to Pfizer/BioNTech in December 2020, then one week later to Moderna.

Moderna alleges Pfizer/BioNTech,

without permission, copied mRNA technology that Moderna had patented between 2010 and 2016, well before deadly Covid-19 emerged in 2019 in China and exploded into global consciousness in early 2020.

Early in the pandemic, Moderna said it would not enforce its Covid-19 patents to help others develop their own vaccines, particularly for low- and

middle-income countries.

But in March 2022 Moderna said it expected companies such as Pfizer and BioNTech to respect its intellectual property rights. It said it would not seek damages for any activity before 8 March 2022.

"We are surprised by the litigation given the Covid-19 vaccine was based on BioNTech's proprietary mRNA technology and developed by both BioNTech and Pfizer," a Pfizer spokesperson said in an emailed statement.

Moderna's Covid vaccine – its lone commercial product – has brought in \$10.4bn in revenue this year while Pfizer's vaccine brought in about \$22bn.

Patent litigation is not uncommon with new technology.

Pfizer and BioNTech are already facing multiple lawsuits from other companies who say the partnership's vaccine infringes on their patents. Pfizer/BioNTech have said they will defend their patents vigorously.

Germany's CureVac, for instance, also filed a lawsuit against BioNTech in Germany in July. BioNTech responded in a statement that its work was original.

Moderna has also been sued for patent infringement in the US and has an ongoing dispute with the US National Institutes of Health over rights

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to mRNA technology. In Friday's statement, Moderna said Pfizer/BioNTech appropriated two types of intellectual property.

One involved an mRNA structure that Moderna says its scientists began developing in 2010 and were the first to validate in human trials in 2015.

"Pfizer and BioNTech took four different vaccine candidates into clinical

testing, which included options that would have steered clear of Moderna's innovative path.

"Pfizer and BioNTech, however, ultimately decided to proceed with a vaccine that has the same exact mRNA

chemical modification to its vaccine," Moderna said in its statement.

The second alleged infringement involves the coding of a full-length spike protein that Moderna says its scientists developed while creating a vaccine

for the coronavirus that causes Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (Mers).

Although the Mers vaccine never went to market, its development helped Moderna rapidly roll out its Covid-19 vaccine.

Polluters could pay billions in fines for PFAS cleanup under new Biden plan

Tom Perkins

The Biden administration on Friday announced a new proposal that could force polluters of two common PFAS compounds to pay billions of dollars for the toxic substances' cleanup.

The Environmental Protection Agency is proposing to designate PFOA and PFOS as hazardous substances under the Superfund law, the statute that guides cleanup at the nation's most contaminated sites.

The proposal, which officials are aiming to finalize in 2023, could accelerate cleanup efforts at hundreds of manufacturing facilities, military bases, airports and other sites where the chemicals are frequently used, and which are contributing to the contamination of drinking water supplies for an estimated 200 million people nationwide.

Public health advocates largely praised the change, though some said it would fail to adequately address widespread contamination.

"Today's historic proposal will mean PFAS polluters are finally held accountable," said Environmental Working Group vice-president of government affairs Melanie Benesh. "For too long, they've had a free pass to dump PFAS into communities and poison their neighbors."

PFAS are a class of about 12,000 chemicals typically used to make thousands of products resist water, stain and heat. They are called "forever chemicals" because they do not naturally break down and accumulate in



▲ Burial mounds where one Maine farmer buried the cows that were poisoned by PFAS on his family farm. Photograph: Tristan Spinski

humans and the environment. A growing body of evidence links them to serious health problems like cancer, birth defects, liver problems, kidney disease and decreased immunity.

The announcement is part of a sweeping Biden administration plan designed to rein in the chemicals' use and address contamination in drinking water and the environment. The EPA several months ago lowered health advisory limits for PFOA and PFOS, finding virtually no exposure to the chemicals is safe.

Public health advocates say PFAS producers like Chemours, 3M, BASF, DuPont and Daikin have for decades

known about, but often hid, the chemicals' dangers from regulators and the public, and should be responsible for cleanup.

"It is fair and necessary to hold polluters accountable for contaminating thousands of communities across the country, particularly because companies like 3M and Dupont did so knowingly, and with impunity," said Christine Santillana, an Earthjustice attorney.

The Superfund law works by triggering cleanups once contamination exceeds EPA thresholds, and another provision allows the agency to sue for cost recovery. Some states automat-

ically adopt EPA's hazardous substance designations and could also initiate action.

Using its lobbying might, the chemical industry has for several years vehemently opposed and successfully derailed legislative and EPA efforts to designate the compounds as hazardous substances. Under the Trump EPA, political appointees effectively killed the proposals, while legislative attempts in 2018 and 2020 were stripped from bills as industry gave donations to influential congressional committee members.

The proposal has also drawn opposition from water utilities, landfills,

local governments and some companies that could be responsible for cleanups, but say they are also victims of chemical industry negligence and deception. Public entities saddled with cleanup costs would probably pass those costs on to taxpayers or ratepayers.

The EPA has said the Superfund law doesn't give it room to decide which responsible parties will be held accountable, but it acknowledged the problem and said it's looking into solutions. Many of the questions could be settled in court.

Though most environmental groups applauded the move, the EPA's actions "are too little and too late," said Timothy Whitehouse, executive director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility and a former EPA attorney.

The hazardous waste designation addresses only two compounds and leaves thousands unaccounted for, he said, while calling on the EPA to regulate the chemicals as a class because they are so similar in structure. The EPA is also failing to track PFAS-contaminated waste, and could better manage it and protect the public under the Resource Conservation Recovery Act, Whitehouse said.

"While years down the road some communities may benefit from EPA's action today, it does nothing to stem the tide of future Superfund sites caused by toxic PFAS contamination," he said.

Nebraska school officials shut down student newspaper after LGBTQ+ issue

Guardian staff and agency

Administrators at a Nebraska school closed down the award-winning student newspaper just days after an edition that included articles and editorials on LGBTQ+ issues.

The action prompted press freedom advocates to decry an act of censorship.

The staff of Northwest public schools' 54-year-old Saga newspaper was informed on 19 May of the paper's elimination, the Grand Island Independent reported.

Three days earlier, the newspaper had printed its June edition, which included an article titled Pride and prejudice: LGBTQIA+ on the origins of pride month and the history of homophobia.

It also included an editorial oppos-



▲ Former Viking Saga newspaper staff members Marcus Pennell, left, and Emma Smith, right, display a pride flag outside of Northwest high school in Grand Island, Nebraska. Photograph: McKenna Lamoree/AP

ing a Florida law that bans some lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity and dubbed by critics as the Don't

Say Gay law.

Officials overseeing the district, which is based in Grand Island, have

not said when or why the decision was made to eliminate the student paper. But an email from a school employee to the Independent cancelling the student paper's printing services on 22 May said it was "because the school board and superintendent are unhappy with the last issue's editorial content".

The paper's demise also came a month after its staff was reprimanded for publishing students' preferred pronouns and names. District officials told students they could only use names assigned at birth in future.

Emma Smith, Saga's assistant editor in 2022, said the student paper was informed that the ban on preferred names was made by the school board.

That decision directly affected Saga staff writer Marcus Pennell, a transgender student, who saw his byline changed in the June issue, against his

wishes, to his female birth name.

"It was the first time that the school had officially been, like, 'We don't really want you here,'" Pennell said. "You know, that was a big deal for me."

Northwest principal PJ Smith referred the Independent's questions to district superintendent Jeff Edwards, who declined to answer questions other than to say it was "an administrative decision".

Some school board members have made no secret of their objection to the Saga's LGBTQ content, including board president Dan Leiser, who said "most people were upset" with it.

Board vice president Zach Mader directly cited the pro-LGBTQ+ editorials, adding that if district taxpayers had read the last issue of the Saga, "they

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Guardian**

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would have been like, ‘Holy cow. What

is going on at our school?’”

“It sounds like a ham-fisted attempt to censor students and discriminate

based on disagreement with perspectives and articles that were featured in the student newspaper,” said Sara Rips,

an attorney for the Nebraska chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. Nebraska Press Association attor-

ney Max Kautsch, who specializes in media law, noted that press freedom is protected in the US constitution.

Florida governor suspends school board quartet over Parkland shooting report

Martin Pengelly and agencies

The governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, on Friday suspended four members of the Broward county school board, acting on a recommendation in a report from a grand jury investigating the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school shooting in which 17 people were killed.

In a statement accompanying his executive order, DeSantis said: “It is my duty to suspend people from office when there is clear evidence of incompetence, neglect of duty, misfeasance or malfeasance.”

The suspensions were the second high-profile move this week against public officials governing schools that were the sites of mass shootings. On Wednesday the public schools police chief of Uvalde, Texas, was fired over the Robb elementary shooting in May in which 19 children and two teachers were killed.

In the Florida case, 14 students and three staff members were killed on 14 February 2018. The shooter, Nikolas Cruz, pleaded guilty and is on trial to determine whether he should face the death penalty.

The grand jury began meeting 15 months after the shooting. In a 122-page report released last Friday, it recommended the suspensions of Patricia Good, Donna Korn, Ann Murray and Laurie Rich Levinson, the school board chair. A former board member, Rosalind Osgood, was also targeted, but she has since been elected to the state senate.

Murray and Levinson were due to leave office at the end of the year. Korn qualified this week for a Novem-



▲ Ron DeSantis. The suspensions were the second high-profile move this week against public officials governing schools that were the sites of mass shootings. Photograph: Paul Hennessy/Sopa/Rex/Shutterstock

ber runoff. Good’s term was to expire in 2024.

DeSantis will himself run for re-election in November, against Charlie Crist, a former Republican governor who is now a Democratic congressman. DeSantis is widely believed to have his eye on a prize grander than the governor’s mansion: the White House, as the Republican nominee in 2024.

When the report was released, Levinson condemned a “political hatchet job” she said was orchestrated by DeSantis.

“It is nasty partisan politics,” Levinson said. “He should be ashamed of himself.”

DeSantis is a Republican, but Broward is a Democratic stronghold. DeSantis fired the Broward sheriff, Scott Israel, after taking office in January 2019, saying his lack of leadership contributed to the Stoneman Douglas shooting.

Levinson pointed to victims’ parents who stood with DeSantis when he announced its formation and said the grand jury was supposed to focus on what caused the shooting.

“It is disgusting on the backs of these families to have a bait-and-switch grand jury,” she said. “The majority of the report has nothing to do with Marjory Stoneman Douglas.”

Korn said that “while I respect the grand jury process, I stand on my record”.

The school board has nine members. Two, Debra Hixon and Lori Alhadeff, were elected after Hixon’s husband, Chris, and Alhadeff’s daughter Alyssa were killed at Stoneman Douglas.

Stand with Parkland, a group that represents most victims’ families, said the grand jury report “proves what we already suspected – acts of incompetence, negligence and cover-up and a School Board [that] is unwilling to face the facts”.

The president of Stand with Park-

land, Tony Montalto, whose 14-year-old daughter Gina was killed, had called on DeSantis to remove the four board members.

On Friday, DeSantis said: “We are grateful to the members of the jury who have dedicated countless hours to this mission, and we hope this suspension brings the Parkland community another step towards justice. This action is in the best interest of the residents and students of Broward county and all citizens of Florida.”

The Broward public schools superintendent at the time of the shooting, Robert Runcie, resigned last year after being indicted for lying to the grand jury. He has pleaded not guilty.

The grand jury said Runcie and the board members made “uninformed or even misinformed decisions” and were guilty of “incompetent management and lack of meaningful oversight”, leading to cost overruns and delays in a school safety and education program approved by voters in 2014.

Announcing the suspensions, DeSantis quoted from the report to say “students continue to be educated in unsafe, aging, decrepit, moldy buildings that were supposed to have been renovated years ago”.

He said: “These are inexcusable actions by school board members who have shown a pattern of emboldening unacceptable behavior, including fraud and mismanagement, across the district.”

Four new members were named. *The Associated Press contributed reporting.*

Texas judge overturns state ban on young adults carrying guns

Reuters

A federal judge in Texas has thrown out the state’s ban on people aged 18 to 20 carrying handguns in what appears to be the first major judicial decision since a landmark ruling on weapons rights by the US supreme court in June.

The challenge to the Texas statute that bans young adults not in active military service from having handguns in public was filed in 2021 by the Firearms Policy Coalition, a gun owners’ rights group. The group said the ban violated the US constitution’s second amendment, which says states can organize militias and that “the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed”.

In June, the US supreme court ruled for the first time that the second amendment guaranteed an individual right to carry weapons in public for



▲ A US firearms store. A Texas judge has scrapped the state’s ban on 18- to 20-year-olds carrying handguns, ruling it has no historical tradition and is unconstitutional. Photograph: Erik S Lesser/EPA

self-defense. The decision also ordered the federal judiciary to apply a “history-only” test when considering challenges to weapons regulations, saying a regulation was constitutional only if it was

similar to those around in the 18th century when the second amendment was ratified.

Judge Mark Pittman of the US district court in Fort Worth ruled on

Thursday that there was no historical tradition of stopping young adults from carrying guns in public in an opinion that repeatedly cited the new supreme court ruling.

The judge suspended his ruling for 30 days to allow Texas to file an appeal.

In finding the ban unconstitutional, Pittman wrote that “the undisputed historical evidence establishes that 18-to-20-year-olds were understood to be a part of the militia in the founding era”.

Lawyers from the Texas attorney general’s office had unsuccessfully argued that there was a historical basis for determining who could carry guns based on age.

The age restriction applied only to the carrying of handguns; long guns can be bought in Texas once a person turns 18, as was the case with the 18-year-old shooter who used a semi-automatic rifle to attack a school in Uvalde, Texas, in May, killing 19 children and

two teachers.

There was no immediate comment from the office of the Texas governor, Greg Abbott, or the state’s attorney general, Ken Paxton, both Republicans.

Last year, Abbott signed a law that meant Texans aged over 21 no longer had to get a license or undergo a background check or training to carry a handgun.

Democratic leaders across the US have decried the supreme court ruling in New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen for making it much more difficult to regulate guns in a country where mass shootings are recurrent.

The Firearms Policy Coalition said it was challenging similar restrictions on young adults carrying guns in Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Illinois, Minnesota, California and Georgia.

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Cody Wisniewski, a senior attorney for the group, said in a statement: “This decision is a significant victory for the rights of young adults in Texas and demonstrates for the rest of the nation that similar bans cannot withstand constitutional challenges grounded in history.”

‘I’m afraid’: critics of anti-cheating technology for students hit by lawsuits

Zoë Corbyn

In 2020, a Canadian university employee named Ian Linkletter became increasingly alarmed by a new kind of technology that was exploding in use with the pandemic. It was meant to detect cheating by college and high-school students taking tests at home, and claimed to work by watching students’ movements and analyzing sounds around them through their webcams and microphones to automatically flag suspicious behavior.

So Linkletter accessed a section of the website of one of the anti-cheating companies, named Proctorio, intended only for instructors and administrators. He shared what he found on social media.

Now Linkletter, who became a prominent critic of the technology, has been sued by the company. But he is not the only one.

Linkletter’s continuing case illustrates how vicious the fight over so called e-proctoring has become. At the height of the pandemic, it was estimated to be in use in nearly 63% of US and Canadian colleges and universities, and is thought still to be available in many of those, despite students’ return to classrooms.

And while there are a number of companies which offer versions of the contentious software, Arizona-based Proctorio, which has a partnership with education giant McGraw Hill, is among the largest providers. It has been carving a name for itself by taking on its critics both in and out of court.

The company, founded in 2013 by its current CEO, Mike Olsen, uses face and gaze detection among other tools to surveil test takers and ensure they are consistently interacting with an exam. Algorithms based on artificial intelligence flag abnormal behavior to university administrators for review.

However, how effective e-proctoring technology is at detecting cheating, or even deterring it, is the subject of debate. And a notable instance when the software was unable to recognize a Black student’s face has brought unflattering attention.

Legal battles

The benefits of this software to students might include accessibility - they no longer have to travel to distant exam locations - while institutions could save on the cost of hiring spaces and invigilators.

But it was students’ concerns - including those at the University of British Columbia (UBC) - shared on Twitter and Reddit that led Linkletter, a learning technology specialist in UBC’s faculty of education, to investigate the technology. They argued that it could

invade privacy, increase anxiety and make students feel under suspicion, and also that it could be discriminatory for students of color, neurodiverse students or those with idiosyncratic behaviors.

In June 2020, Linkletter was shocked when Proctorio’s CEO shared part of a private conversation between a Proctorio support agent and a UBC student on Reddit. (Olsen subsequently apologized.)

One of Linkletter’s particular worries was the lack of transparency around how Proctorio’s algorithms worked. He wanted to find out more.

In August 2020, he accessed materials in Proctorio’s instructor help center.

He tweeted out links to seven unlisted YouTube videos he found there about how the technology worked - such as, for example, about how it detected abnormal eye and head movement and how it did a room scan.

The next month the company sued Linkletter, claiming breach of copyright among other infringements. It argued that because of his actions, students would be able to modify their behavior and competitors could adopt similar technologies, which could harm Proctorio’s business.

“I was 36 when I was sued and I’ll be lucky if this is over by 40,” Linkletter told the Guardian. “It’s really jammed up my life.” He has had to run a GoFundMe campaign to help cover his legal defense costs, which have so far totaled over \$100,000. He and his wife have put having a family on indefinite hold because of the financial and health strain, and he’s received counseling to help him manage the anxiety it has caused.

“The lawsuit does not vindicate any legitimate interest,” says Linkletter. “Its purpose from the very beginning has been to interfere with the public debate about academic surveillance software.”

Proctorio sees it differently, it told the Guardian: “This was a narrow action taken as a last resort because Mr Linkletter illegally and repeatedly distributed our confidential and copyrighted information online.”

Meanwhile, also in late 2020, Erik Johnson, a computer engineering student at another college that used Proctorio, also became concerned about the technology. Johnson, at Miami University in Ohio, examined the files that were saved to his computer when he installed the software, and uploaded excerpts of the code for the public to see. Johnson believed it supported his criticisms that the software was invasive, inequitable and overly controlling of a test taker’s computer.

Proctorio got the material removed. Johnson sued it, claiming the company

was abusing copyright law to interfere with his free speech. Proctorio sued him back, arguing copyright infringement and that Johnson had defamed the company and damaged its business relationships with universities.

Chilling debate?

Students continue to share negative experiences with e-proctoring online - where they are amplified by anonymous Twitter feeds like Procteario and ProcterrorU (name plays on Proctorio and another company ProctorU). But Proctorio’s recourse to law may have affected public discussion.

Multiple critics of the technology declined to speak to the Guardian citing an aura of litigiousness. There is “censorship through the fear of a lawsuit”, says Albert Fox Cahn, founder and executive director of the Surveillance Technology Oversight Project, another advocacy group which has been critical of e-proctoring. “I have heard from dozens of individuals who want to speak out about this technology but fear the repercussions.”

Ethan Wilde is one who says he is treading carefully because of Proctorio’s actions. Wilde, a faculty member at the computer studies department at Santa Rosa Junior College in the San Francisco Bay Area, has been campaigning against the use of automated proctoring since his institution announced it had obtained a license for Proctorio, using federal coronavirus relief funding, in early 2021.

But, having followed the legal cases from afar, he is mindful of calling out the company and its technology too vocally, and keeps his criticisms off Twitter. “I am afraid of Proctorio,” he says.

Yet Proctorio argues that public discourse is alive and well. “A quick glance at our Twitter mentions would show that we do not keep people from saying all number of things about us,” says a spokesperson.

Whatever the case, Proctorio has painted a target on its own back, says Lia Holland, campaigns and communications director for anti-surveillance advocacy group Fight for the Future.

It runs a campaign against e-proctoring which includes a website that satirizes Olsen - and has also found itself fighting a subpoena by Proctorio. “Proctorio’s own behavior has made it the example that we point to most often,” Holland said.

Racist technology?

While there are many charges against e-proctoring technology, perhaps most egregious is the potential of the software to discriminate on the basis of a user’s skin color. In one instance, Proctorio was unable to see a Black student’s face.

In early 2021, Amaya Ross, an African American psychology student who

recently completed her third year at Ohio State University, was gearing up in her dorm room to use Proctorio for the first time to take a practice biology quiz. She knew she needed good lighting, and made sure it was the middle of the day. But despite her best efforts, she couldn’t get the software to detect her face.

Eventually she found that Proctorio worked if she stood directly under the overhead light - though it was hardly an ideal way to take an online test. So she mounted a powerful flashlight on the shelf above her computer and shone it directly at her face. Only then, over 45 minutes later, was she able to take the 30-minute quiz without issue. “My white friends didn’t have any problems,” she notes. (The Mozilla Foundation released an animated video of Amaya’s story.)

Amaya and Janice Wyatt-Ross, her mother, credit Proctorio for its responsiveness. When the story gained traction after Janice posted about it on Twitter, the company got in touch and helped troubleshoot what, says Janice, it described as a “lighting issue”. Yet the pair worry.

“Amaya is a problem solver, she was able to figure it out ... [but] what about other students?” asks Janice. Automated proctoring software needs to be inclusive, says Amaya. “If you are going to do something this large” - introduce widescale e-proctoring - “make sure it is not a software that’s marginalizing people who already feel marginalized on campus,” she says.

Proctorio told the Guardian that it had engaged an outside third party, BABL AI, to audit its face detection algorithm - and while the first audit found “no measurable (statistically significant) bias”, it was doing a second audit that should be completed this fall.

A broader issue is, of course, whether the software achieves its overall goals of thwarting cheaters.

In one experiment, published in 2021, six of 30 computer science students were asked to cheat. Proctorio failed to flag any of the cheating students while human reviewers detected one (out of six).

Proctorio noted it was a small study and referred to others that it says back up e-proctoring’s efficacy - including one of 648 students, published in 2020, that suggests e-proctoring prevents cheating.

Different paths

Linkletter and Johnson’s cases have gone different ways.

This March, Proctorio and Johnson reached a settlement. In a joint statement Johnson acknowledges that some of his comments about Proctorio were “imprecise and presented without con-

text”. Meanwhile Proctorio appears to accept there are some valid issues with the technology. “We recognize some face detection and gaze detection algorithms have higher error rates, or work less accurately, for people of color. These issues have long existed to some degree in all camera-based technology,” reads the document, adding Proctorio is sensitive to the matter and made “substantial efforts” to address it.

Linkletter, who has now moved to another job as librarian at a different institution, continues to fight Proctorio’s lawsuit. He has had some smaller legal wins. But he has failed in his attempt to have the case dismissed under legislation designed to protect individuals from being sued for expressing their views on matters of public interest. He is appealing that ruling, also issued in March, and two Canadian civil liberties organizations recently applied to join his appeal.

Separately and unrelated to the Linkletter or Johnson cases, class-action lawsuits have been filed against Proctorio along with two other companies - Examity and Honorlock - alleging they are in breach of the Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act (BIPA).

The act is considered one of the toughest digital privacy laws in the US and has been used to hit companies such as Facebook (now Meta) and Google over their use of facial recognition, resulting in large settlements. It regulates how companies collect, store, use, and share Illinois residents’ biologically unique data (for example fingerprints, iris or retina and face geometry scans).

The lawsuits allege that the companies failed to provide the required data retention and destruction policies and - in the case of Proctorio and Honorlock - failed to obtain the proper consent to take biometric information. Proctorio, for one, denies these charges. It says its technology does not capture, collect or use biometric information in the first place, for one thing because face and gaze detection do not uniquely identify an individual’s face.

And, in another court case brought by a student against Cleveland State University, an Ohio judge has just ruled that scanning rooms via e-proctoring software before students take exams is unconstitutional.

For Linkletter it is all a start to holding the companies accountable. AI surveillance was normalized for students in the pandemic, he says. “[But] whether it will become part of the future or something that we’re ashamed of is not settled.”

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The Guardian

‘This you?’: the seven letters exposing rightwing hypocrisy on student debt relief

Matthew Cantor

Conservatives are frothing at the mouth over Joe Biden's decision to forgive \$10,000 in student debt for millions, railing against what they call “student loan socialism”. But their carefully crafted tweets have been undermined over and over again with two words: “This you?”

Were there ever seven letters more powerful? On Twitter, the phrase is an instant marker of hypocrisy, cutting down the mighty from politicians to celebrities to brands. It typically comes as a reply to an opinionated tweet, accompanied by a screenshot of an earlier remark from the same person endorsing the opposite point of view.

Now Biden's debt cancellation has given the phrase new life: “This you?” is rolling through Twitter like a bowling ball, toppling critic after critic as it nullifies their claims. The source of many of the “receipts”, in this case, is the public record of those who had their Payment Protection Plan (PPP) loans – the federal funds intended to keep businesses afloat early in the pandemic – forgiven.

The conservative advocacy group PragerU proclaimed: “It's not complicated. Bailing out irresponsible behavior will spur more irresponsible behavior.” “This you?” asked @kaoticleftist, showing hundreds of thousands of dollars in forgiven PPP funds.

The rightwing Daily Caller pub-



▲ Marjorie Taylor Greene, left, got the “This you?” treatment. Photograph: Seth Wenig/AP

lished a piece headlined: “Biden debt forgiveness could send tuition through the roof”, prompting another Twitter user, @coreyastewart, to post a screenshot of the PPP funds that organization reportedly had forgiven.

“Student loan forgiveness sounds really nice to illegal immigrants, people with no life experience, people who don't have families yet, and people who use preferred pronouns,” wrote the conservative commentator Steven Crowder, earning a host of “This you?” replies – with screenshots highlighting

more than \$71,000 in loan forgiveness for his company.

Those closer to the seats of power also received helpful feedback. The Iowa senator Chuck Grassley also criticized Biden's plan, saying it would “fuel further inflation hurting those who can least afford it UNFAIR.” “This you?” asked a candidate for local office, pointing to Grassley's application for a federal farm bailout.

Users also accused the rightwing pundit Ben Shapiro of a double standard, but he denied having received any

PPP money and said he'd issued cease-and-desist letters to organizations claiming otherwise – pointing to the messy nature of internet sleuthing. But it wasn't just everyday Twitter users calling out hypocrisy.

On Thursday evening, the White House entered the fray. The Georgia congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said it was “completely unfair” for the government to “say your debt is completely forgiven” – after her loan of more than \$180,000 was forgiven, the official White House account noted.

It was just one of a series of digs at critics: the Florida congressman Matt Gaetz, the White House said, had more than \$482,000 in PPP loans forgiven, while the Pennsylvania congressman Mike Kelly got off the hook for more than \$987,000.

It's not the first time the meme has been widely deployed to illustrate double standards on a national scale. As brands and celebrities touted their support for the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, social media quickly exposed many as simply trend followers, juxtaposing their posts with examples of past offensive behavior – marking what Aisha Harris described in the New York Times as “a swift undercutting of performative wokeness”. Users drew attention to an NFL star posting a symbolic black square after hanging out with Donald Trump; the Baltimore police department's supportive words years after the death of Freddie Gray; and a host of other apparent changes of heart.

As Harris wrote, there's power in such a sharable medium. It's true that, as the Twitter user @trayne_wreck – who collected countless examples of loan-based double standards – writes, highlighting hypocrisy is unlikely to change the minds of those who are called out.

But, she says, it could make a difference to those of us reading: “You, who can do something about it, who can build power to make them obsolete. I hope it will resonate with you.”

‘Democrats have their mojo’: has the tide shifted for Biden and his party?

Joan E Greve in Rockville, Maryland

Joe Biden has transformed his rough July into a jubilant August. Last month, the US president was drowning in negative headlines about his handling of numerous crises, from the war in Ukraine to record-high gas prices and the apparent demise of his signature legislative proposal.

Now, as the summer draws to a close, Biden is riding high, powered by the passage of Democrats' climate and healthcare package and glimmers of hope for his party's prospects in the midterm elections. That optimism was on vivid display on Thursday, as Biden took the stage for a rally held by the Democratic National Committee in Rockville, Maryland.

“We've come a long way in 18 months. Covid no longer controls our lives. A record number of Americans are working,” Biden told the cheering crowd. “We never gave up. We never gave in. We're delivering for the American people now.”

Biden's speech offered a preview of Democrats' closing message to voters as they enter the final sprint leading up to the November elections. With the Inflation Reduction Act signed into



▲ Joe Biden's speech in Maryland showed the Democratic party's optimism as they enter the final sprint to the November elections. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

law and Roe v Wade overturned by the conservative-led supreme court, Democrats believe they have a successful strategy to win re-election this fall, and they are prepared to defy previous predictions of a Republican shellacking.

“At the top of the year, it was almost like Democrats were counted out, and most were preparing for the absolute worst,” said Anthony Robinson, political director of the National Democratic Training Committee. “I think that

we're in a completely, completely different headspace going into the midterms. There's still a lot to do, but I think there's a definite shift in the tide.”

This week saw fresh indicators that Democrats may be able to avoid the

widespread losses usually suffered by the president's party in the midterms. Democrat Pat Ryan narrowly won a special congressional election in upstate New York on Tuesday, giving him the chance to represent a bellwether district that flipped from supporting Donald Trump in 2016 to backing Biden in 2020. Democrats have similarly outperformed expectations in other recent special elections in Nebraska and Minnesota.

Ryan focused his campaign on the need to protect abortion rights in the wake of the Roe reversal, which ended the federal right to abortion access. Democrats say Ryan's campaign could provide a playbook to other candidates looking to motivate voters to go to the polls in November.

“I think that he found what resonated in his community and met people where they are,” Robinson said. “It wasn't about a bunch of figures and numbers. It was just about the raw emotion and that people's lives are at stake. That's something that I think is important to everyone.”

The passage of Democrats' spending package has also helped mitigate concerns that candidates would have little to campaign on, despite

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the party’s control of the White House and Congress. The Inflation Reduction Act, which Biden signed into law last week, includes \$369bn in funds to reduce America’s planet-heating emissions and several provisions aimed at lowering healthcare costs, particularly for Medicare recipients.

“Democrats have their mojo after passing numerous policies that will tangibly impact people’s lives, and now the key is to really sell it with confidence before the midterms,” said Adam Green, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee. “Lowering prescription drug prices, lowering healthcare costs and making water and air healthier for people’s kids is a very good message to take to voters who wonder, does it matter if I vote Democrat or vote at all?”

Biden continued the string of victories on Wednesday, as he signed an executive order to cancel at least \$10,000 in student loan debt for mil-

lions of borrowers. The order fell far short of what progressives had demanded, but even Democrats who had pushed for more debt cancellation celebrated the news.

“At the end of the day, Biden exceeded the expectations of most progressives on what he would do on student debt,” Green said. “If people want more, they’re certainly not going to get it with Republicans. But this is going to wipe out debt completely for about 20 million people and be a giant chunk out of their debt for many others.”

Before Thursday’s rally, Biden met Democratic donors for a \$1m fundraiser, where he attacked Donald Trump and his Republican predecessor’s party loyalists and voter base.

“We’re seeing now either the beginning or the death knell of an extreme Maga agenda,” he said, referring to Trump’s Make America Great Again campaign slogan. “It’s not just Trump ... It’s almost semi-fascism,” Biden added.

As Biden has enjoyed this recent

wave of wins, his approval rating has ticked up as well, although it remains underwater. A Reuters/Ipsos poll completed on Tuesday found that 41% of Americans approve of Biden’s job performance, marking the first reading above 40% since early June.

Earlier this month, Democrats overtook Republicans on the generic congressional ballot for the first time since last November, according to FiveThirtyEight.

Those developments have led some election forecasters to shift their predictions for the November elections. FiveThirtyEight’s forecast model suggests Democrats are now slightly favored to maintain control of the Senate, and the Cook Political Report downgraded its outlook for Republican gains in the House after Ryan’s victory in New York.

But Republicans are still favored to regain control of the House, reflecting the strong headwinds that Democrats face as they look toward November. Republicans secured sev-

eral key victories in redistricting battles, giving them a more favorable House map. Considering Democrats’ extremely narrow majority in the House, redistricting alone may provide enough of an advantage for Republicans to recapture the lower chamber.

Americans’ anxiety over the economy presents additional challenges for Democrats. Inflation is higher than it has been in more than 40 years, squeezing families’ budgets amid concerns that the US has entered a recession. An NBC News poll taken this month found that 74% of voters believe the country is on the wrong track, marking the fifth month in a row that the reading was over 70%.

Republicans remain confident that the pessimistic national mood will convince voters to reject Democrats in November, and they predicted that the student debt cancelation would end up backfiring on Biden. Ronna McDaniel, chair of the Republican National Committee, attacked the policy as a “bailout for the wealthy”.

“Biden’s bailout unfairly punishes Americans who saved for college or made a different career choice, and voters see right through this short-sighted, poorly veiled vote-buy,” McDani-
niel said on Wednesday.

Democrats acknowledge they still have their work cut out for them over the next three months, which is more than enough time for Republicans to address their sudden reversal in fortune. But as he addressed an exuberant crowd chanting “four more years”, Biden seemed more ready than ever to overcome historical trends and protect his party’s majorities in Congress this fall.

“We the people’ are the first words of our constitution, and ‘we the people’ will still determine the destiny of America. If ‘we the people’ stand together, we will prevail,” Biden said on Thursday. “We just have to keep the faith. We just have to persevere. We just have to vote.”

Reuters contributed reporting

Colombia’s leftwing government unveils tax-the-rich plan to tackle poverty

Megan Janetsky in Bogotá

Colombia’s new leftist government has proposed an ambitious plan to tax the rich in an effort to combat poverty in one of the most unequal countries in the Americas.

If implemented, the Piketty-esque legislation proposed by President Gustavo Petro could raise more than \$11.5bn annually to fund anti-poverty efforts, free public university and other social welfare programs.

Petro, a former urban guerrilla who became the country’s first leftist leader, rose to power on a raft of promises centered around social progress at a time when the South American country is still plagued by pandemic-fueled economic turmoil.

If passed, the plan would raise taxes on the country’s highest earners – approximately 2% of Colombia’s population – cut tax benefits for the richest and fight tax evasion.

The tax hikes would progressively increase as income increases. It would add an annual wealth tax on savings and property above \$630,000, and would add a 10% tax on some of Colombia’s biggest exports – oil, coal and gold – after prices rise above a certain threshold.

“This should not be viewed as a punishment or a sacrifice,” said Petro. “It is simply a solidarity payment that



▲ President Gustavo Petro aims to channel the taxes raised in anti-poverty efforts, free public university and other social welfare programs. Photograph: Luisa González/Reuters

someone fortunate makes to a society that has enabled them to generate wealth.”

The wealth tax was among Petro’s chief promises during his campaign and would mark a significant step toward achieving his bold policy agenda, which has inspired hope in some and skepticism in others.

It is also part of a larger debate playing out around the world at a time of deepening global inequalities.

“This is not just Colombia,” said economist Álvaro Pardo. “This is a large conversation in any country – the ideas of equity and progress, the idea that those who have the most have to pay more. These are universal concepts we’re drawing upon.”

Petro’s proposal has prompted alarm in the country’s private sector and political elite who argue the tax will dampen investment, push job creators out of the country and – according to the arch-conservative former president Álvaro Uribe – potentially deepen poverty.

“We support all these efforts for the country to overcome poverty,” Uribe said following a meeting with Petro this summer. “But not at the cost of withering away the private sector.”

But at the height of the country’s decades-long armed conflict, Uribe imposed a similar temporary tax in order to fund his war with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc) guerrilla group.

Last year, amid stewing resentment for Petro’s predecessor, Iván Duque, another tax reform proposal ignited months of anti-government protests, which became symbolic of deeper social unrest and endemic inequalities.

“It was sort of a perfect storm from political opposition to the government, post-pandemic economic hardship and the government’s response,” said Sergio Guzmán, director of Colombia Risk Analysis. “Under this government, things are different.”

This bill, he said, “is more progressive in nature”, doing away with key exemptions that he and economists say have allowed richer individuals to pay lower taxes than the average Colombian.

It’s also more permanent than other wealth taxes. The measure will now have to go through congress, where it is likely to pass.

The proposal was a welcome move for many Colombians who have felt like they have been on the outside looking in.

Marlon Mendoza, an Afro-Colombian entrepreneur on the Caribbean coast, was one of 1.6 million Colombians who, during the pandemic, were knocked out of the middle class and back into poverty.

“The poor got poorer, and the rich got richer,” he said.

He went from having an office and a home in the city of Cartagena to re-



▲ A supporter displays a banner saying ‘Don’t let us down’ at the inauguration of President Gustavo Petro in Bogotá on 7 August. Photograph: Mauricio Dueñas Cas-

turning to the unpaved streets of his town of birth on the outskirts of the city, struggling paycheck to paycheck.

Some observers warn that the tax plan will only address the tip of the iceberg.

Pardo said: “The challenge is gigantic because it means breaking a structure that has been in place for decades, a structure that favors rich sectors and big companies. It’s going to be very difficult”

But it’s that painful growth that needs to happen, says Mendoza.

“This is a new idea. Human beings, not just Colombians, we’ve gotten used to the status quo. Down the line, if that thing is hurting us, it’s hard to branch away from what we’re used to,” he said. “But if we don’t do that, there will never be change.”

Six of 43 missing Mexican students were kept alive in warehouse for days

AP in Mexico City

Six of the 43 Mexican students forcibly disappeared in 2014 were allegedly kept alive in a warehouse for days, and

then turned over to the commander of the local army base who ordered their killings, the Mexican government official leading the Truth Commission said Friday.

The interior undersecretary, Ale-

jandro Encinas, made the revelation with little fanfare during a lengthy defense of the commission’s report, first released a week earlier. At that time, despite declaring the disappearances a “state crime” and saying that the army

watched it happen without intervening, Encinas made no mention of six students being turned over to Col José Rodríguez Pérez.

On Friday, Encinas emphasized that authorities were closely monitoring the

students from the radical teachers’ college at Ayotzinapa from the time they left their campus through their abduction by local police in the town of Iguala

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that night. A soldier who had infiltrated the school was among the abducted students and Encinas asserted that the army had not followed its own protocols to try to rescue him.

“There is also information corroborated with emergency 089 telephone calls where allegedly six of the 43 disappeared students were held during several days and alive in what they call the old warehouse and from there were turned over to the colonel,” Encinas said. “Allegedly the six students were alive for as many as four days after the events and were killed and disappeared on orders of the colonel, allegedly the then Col José Rodríguez Pérez.”

The defense department did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the allegations Friday.

The truth commission report notes that the army registered an anonymous emergency call on 30 September 2014, four days after the students’ abduction. The caller said the students were being held in a large concrete warehouse in a location described as “Pueblo Viejo”. The caller proceeded to describe the location.

That entry was followed by sev-



▲ A person walks past portraits of some of the 43 missing students in September 2015. Photograph: Pedro Pardo/AFP/Getty Images

eral pages of redacted material, but that section of the report concluded with the following: “As can be seen, obvious collusion existed between agents of the Mexican state with the criminal group Guerreros Unidos that tolerated, allowed and participated in events of

violence and disappearance of the students, as well as the government’s attempt to hide the truth about the events.”

Later, in a summary of how the commission’s report differed from the original investigation’s conclusions,

there is mention of a colonel.

“On September 30 ‘the colonel’ mentions that they will take care of cleaning everything up and that they had already taken charge of the six students who had remained alive,” the report said.

On 26 September 2014, local police took the students off buses they had commandeered in Iguala. The motive remains unclear eight years later. Their bodies have never been found, though fragments of burned bone have been matched to three of the students.

The families of the missing students have for years pressured the government to more deeply investigate the military’s involvement.

Last week, federal agents arrested former attorney general Jesus Murillo Karam, who oversaw the original investigation. On Wednesday, a judge ordered that he stand trial for forced disappearance, torture and official misconduct. Prosecutors allege Murillo Karam created a false narrative about what happened to the students to quickly appear to resolve the case.

Authorities also last week said arrest warrants were issued for 20 army soldiers and officers, five local officials, 33 local police officers and 11 state police officers as well as 14 gang members. Neither the army nor prosecutors have said how many of those suspects are now in custody.

It was also not immediately clear if Rodríguez Pérez was among those sought.

Lighthouse keeper wanted for north-westerly corner of Britain

Libby Brooks Scotland correspondent

The role of a retained lighthouse keeper is, says Barry Millar, an extremely attractive job. At 74, the former biology teacher has no intention of quitting his position maintaining 10 lighthouses across Ayrshire and Galloway across Scotland’s south-west coast.

And his message to anyone considering an application to fill the vacancy for a keeper at the most north-westerly point on mainland Britain is simple: “Give it a go.”

With a closing date of 31 August, the Northern Lighthouse Board is advertising for somebody to carry out routine inspections and maintenance of the lighthouses at Cape Wrath and Stoer Head, further down the Sutherland coast.

An applicant in search of peace or isolation will find it on the desolate Cape Wrath peninsula, where the lighthouse looms over the rolling Atlantic.

Constructed in 1828 by the renowned civil engineer and lighthouse designer Robert Stevenson, the 20-metre tower of white-washed granite dominates the cape, which takes its name from the old Norse *hvarf*, meaning turning point, and was used by



▲ The lighthouse and cliffs at Cape Wrath in Sutherland. Photograph: Vincent Lowe/Alamy

Vikings as a navigation point for their ships.

The part-time position requires one eight-hour visit a month to Cape Wrath between April and September and two further visits, before and after Christmas, along with similar monthly visits to Stoer Head – a grand total of 184 working hours a year.

The starting salary, pro rated, is £2,043 per annum, and the applicant must have a good general education, be physically fit and have a current, full UK driving licence.

Up to 60 applications are expected for the role, with such posts only coming free every five to 10 years.

The Northern Lighthouse Board

operates and maintains 208 lighthouses across Scotland and the Isle of Man, guiding mariners safely through coastal waters for over two centuries. All are fully automated, but still demand regular inspection and maintenance.

Lighthouses are surprising complex, Millar says. They are generally

Category A listed and most are more than 200 years old. Considering this along with their exposed positions, it is “extraordinary”, he says, how reliable they remain. “Since I started more than 20 years ago, I’ve only had one out on one night,” he says proudly.

Despite ever more sophisticated on-board navigation systems, the shipping and fishing industry still rely on these fixed points on land.

While the lighthouses are very robustly built, inspections are essential to spot damage that an automated system cannot.

“Occasionally the glazing around the light breaks. Sometimes you can feel it shuddering in the wind, or doors blow open on the balcony. Once the solar panels on the Ailsa Craig lighthouse blew off in a gale,” he said.

Millar would encourage anyone to consider the role that he realised was “absolutely ideal” when his wife pointed it out to him as he approached his mid-50s. “Everybody in the team is very supportive and it’s like a big family.”

“My day at the office is taking a boat to a beautiful lighthouse. I enjoy working alone and getting to climb a tower that people have been going up for 200 years to keep that tradition going.”

Dealing with drought: how fog collectors are providing trees with water in Spain

Stephen Burgen

As summer fires continue to devastate

huge areas of woodland in Spain, France and Portugal, and drought plagues Europe and the UK leaving tens of thousands of acres at risk of deserti-

fication, some scientists are busy collecting fog.

The EU-backed Life Nieblas project (*niebla* is Spanish for fog) is using fog

collectors in Gran Canaria in Spain’s Canary Islands, and Portugal, to improve degraded landscape and fuel reforestation.

Fog collectors – sheets of plastic mesh erected in the path of the wind –

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already exist but have never been used efficiently, says Vicenç Carabassa, the project's head scientist, who works for the Centre for Ecological Research and Forestry Applications (Creaf), a public research institute at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. As wind blows fog through the mesh, water droplets collect and fall into the containers below.

"Fog collection is particularly applicable in restoring the Canary Islands' *laurisilva* [laurel forests], which themselves exist by collecting fog water," says Carabassa. The water droplets from the fog condense on the trees' shiny, waxy leaves. "The system allows saplings to flourish until they are mature enough to capture water themselves," he adds. *Laurisilva* is sub-tropical rainforest populated by evergreen species, though not necessarily the familiar laurel trees found in parks and gardens.

To operate well, fog collectors need both fog and wind, conditions that exist in the Canaries and Portugal, but less so in the Mediterranean, where forest fires and desertification are a growing problem.

"We're still trying to discover what



▲ The fog collectors are sheets of plastic mesh erected in the path of the wind. Photograph: Courtesy of Life Nieblas

are the optimal conditions for fog collectors to work," says Carabassa, who adds that *laurisilva* restoration can help to replenish the aquifers that are under constant strain in the Canaries.

As well as the Canary Islands, where Creaf is working with the Gran Canaria local authority, the public company Gesplan, which manages the project, and several other research institutes and public organisations, the technique will be tested in maritime areas around Barcelona and the El Bruc municipality in northern Catalonia, which was ravaged by a huge fire in 2015.

On Gran Canaria, the goal is to capture 215,000 litres of fog and dew water a year to repopulate 35 hectares (86 acres) with 20,000 laurel trees in the Doramas Forest, an area at high risk of desertification as a result of fires. The reforestation will be carried out with native species typical of *laurisilva*, including the candleberry myrtle (*Myrica faya*), strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*) and barbusano (*Apollonias barbusana*).

Another device being tested alongside the fog collectors is the "cocoon", a biodegradable, doughnut-shaped container made of recycled cardboard that

surrounds the hole where a seedling is planted and can hold 25 litres of water. It provides water and shelter for the seedling, at least during its first year, which is usually the most critical.

A lid reduces evaporation loss from the bowl, and the cocoon also protects the seedling from small herbivores. The cocoon is buried in the ground and is initially filled manually with water, thereafter by rainfall and, in the Canaries and Portugal, with water from fog collectors.

The cocoons have been tested in Spain, Italy and Greece, where they were planted in a variety of soils and climates alongside a control group planted in the conventional way. Both groups were initially supplied with the same amount of water and there was no further irrigation, with the seedlings monitored over two years. Compared with conventional planting systems, the cocoons increased the rate of seedling survival, especially under dry growing conditions.

Seedlings planted with cocoons showed a survival rate close to 60%, compared with 40% for those planted using conventional methods. The response of holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*), a key native species, was particularly positive in terms of survival and growth



▲ As the wind blows the fog through the mesh, the water droplets are collected. Photograph: Courtesy of Life Nieblas

rate.

The cocoon was developed by the Dutch firm Land Life and is used all over the world, but the Green Link project, run by Creaf and its partners as part of the Life Nieblas project, is focused on a plantation of organic almonds in Almería, as well as reforestation schemes in Valencia, Alicante, Catalonia, Italy and Greece.

With extreme weather likely to lead to more fires, it is hoped that these techniques will speed up the decades-long process of reforestation.

"We are tackling reforestation in a more viable and effective way, acting in areas that are particularly vulnerable to climate change and desertification," says Carabassa.

Find more age of extinction coverage [here](#), and follow biodiversity reporters [Phoebe Weston](#) and [Patrick Greenfield](#) on Twitter for all the latest news and features

India ruling party legislator arrested over prophet remarks amid protests

Shaikh Azizur Rahman

Police in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad have arrested a suspended leader of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) for making allegedly abusive remarks about the prophet Muhammad.

Police arrested T Raja Singh, 45, on Thursday after thousands of Muslims took to the streets in the city protesting against his speech.

After his arrest under the Preventive Detention Act, police alleged in a statement that he had been "habitually delivering provocative and inflammatory speeches and driving a wedge between communities leading to public disorder".

The police also accused him of being involved in 18 "communal offences" in the past.

Singh, a two-time legislator in the assembly of Telangana state, of which Hyderabad is the capital, was arrested two days after the BJP had reportedly suspended him for his alleged hate speeches and related activities.

Three months ago, the former BJP spokesperson Nupur Sharma made an anti-Islam comment that sparked massive international outrage, with many Muslim countries condemning India. BJP was forced to suspend her from the party.



▲ T Raja Singh greeted by supporters after he was released by a court on bail in Hyderabad. Photograph: Reuters

Suspending Singh on Tuesday, the central disciplinary committee of BJP said his views were his own and "contrary to the party's position". Singh was also asked to explain why he should not be expelled from the party.

The issue arose two weeks ago when Singh threatened to violently disrupt the Hyderabad show of the

Muslim comedian Munawar Faruqui. Singh claimed Faruqui had made jokes about Hindu gods and offended the sentiments of Hindus.

In a video released on social media, Singh threatened to "burn down" the venue of Faruqui's show. "We will beat him up and throw him out of Telangana. None can stop us - this is a chal-

lenge," he said.

In another video, released on 22 August, Singh disparaged the prophet Muhammad.

In protest against his latest video on Tuesday, thousands of Muslims in Hyderabad burned effigies of Singh and demanded his arrest. Police arrested Singh immediately but he was released

on bail hours later because of a "technical error".

After Singh was released on Tuesday, Hindu supporters greeted him with garlands.

"I did not name any religious community in my video speech. I targeted only Faruqui and I stand by my statement ... I will release a second video on this issue soon," Singh said. His party suspended him shortly afterwards.

Singh has long been accused of issuing comments targeting Islam and Muslims. Although many call him a "hate monger", to his supporters and Hindu rightwing groups he is viewed as a "firebrand Hindu hero" and a "saviour of Hinduism".

In 2020, Facebook suspended him for violation of its policies on hate speech.

The Delhi-based Muslim community leader Zafarul-Islam Khan said: "Many BJP leaders target Muslims the way Singh does. Hate and othering of Muslims is a major plank of the Hindu nationalist party's political strategy in the Hindu-majority country."

The BJP has been contacted for comment about Khan's statement.

Asaduddin Owaisi, the Hyderabad-based Muslim leader and MP, said, Singh was a "threat to peace" in the country.

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Turkish pop star Gülşen arrested over religious schools joke

AP in Ankara

The Turkish pop star Gülşen has been arrested on charges of “inciting hatred and enmity” over a joke she made about Turkey’s religious schools.

The 46-year-old singer-songwriter, whose full name is Gülşen Çolakoglu, was taken away from her home in Istanbul for questioning and formally arrested late on Thursday. She was then taken to a prison pending trial.

The arrest has sparked outrage on social media. Government critics said the move was an effort by the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to consolidate support from his religious and conservative base ahead of elections in 10 months’ time.

The charges were based on a joke Gülşen made during an April concert in Istanbul, where she quipped that one of her musicians’ “perversion” stemmed from attending a religious school. A video of the singer’s comment began circulating on social media, with a hashtag calling for her arrest.

Gülşen – who previously became a target in conservative Islamic circles because of her revealing stage outfits and unfurling of an LGBTQ flag at a



▲ Gülşen’s request to be released from custody pending the outcome of a trial was rejected. Photograph: AP

concert – apologised for the offence the joke caused but said her comments were seized on by those wanting to deepen polarisation in the country.

During her questioning by court authorities, Gülşen rejected accusations that she incited hatred and

enmity, and said she had “endless respect for the values and sensitivities of my country”, the state-run Anadolu Agency reported.

Her request to be released from custody pending the outcome of a trial was rejected.

Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of Turkey’s main opposition party, called on judges and prosecutors to release Gülşen. “Don’t betray law and justice; release the artist now!” he wrote on Twitter.

The spokesperson for Erdoğan’s

Justice and Development party, known by its Turkish abbreviation AKP, appeared, however, to defend the decision to arrest the singer, saying “inciting hatred is not an art form”.

“Targeting a segment of society with the allegation of “perversion” and trying to polarise Turkey is a hate crime and a disgrace to humanity,” the AKP spokesperson Ömer Çelik tweeted.

Erdoğan and many members of his Islam-based ruling party are graduates of religious schools, which were originally established to train imams. The number of religious schools in Turkey has increased under Erdoğan, who has promised to raise a “pious generation”.

Among those calling for Gülşen’s release was the Turkish pop star Tarkan, best known internationally for his song Kiss Kiss.

“Our legal system, which turns a blind eye to corruption, thieves, those who break the law and massacre nature, those who kill animals and those who use religion to polarise society through their bigoted ideas – has arrested Gülşen in one whack,” Tarkan said in a statement posted on Twitter.

Amsterdam’s oldest houseboat to be removed from canal

Daniel Boffey in Brussels

The oldest houseboat on the canals of Amsterdam is being removed after being left unable to pass under the low bridges around it.

The Dogger, built in 1865, is a former watership that transported drinking water to the city’s breweries. It is believed to have moved into the Prinsengracht canal in 1888.

The vessel is said by its owner, Jeroen Elsen, 55, to be uninsurable. One reason is that it cannot sail out of the canal for repairs as it is too tall for the bridges around it.

The Dogger’s bottom has not been out of the water in 134 years, when it should be take out every seven years. The rusty exterior of the boat suggests long-term neglect.

In 1996, it was saved from demolition after a radio report led to a public campaign of support. In recent years, the Dogger was hit by a tourist boat, leaving it taking on water that needs to be continuously pumped out.

The boat will be removed from the



▲ The Dogger (pictured in the foreground) is considered beautiful by some and an eyesore by others, its owner said. Photograph: Panther Media/Alamy

canal within days. Elsen said he could not risk the boat sinking in the Prinsengracht but he thought the move was a

tragedy.

He told Het Parool: “We are talking about 96 tons of steel and concrete. If it

sinks, it sinks to the middle of the moat, blocking the passage. Then I get big, big problems with my liability.”

Attempts to secure insurance had failed, he said. “They asked on the phone: ‘How long has the boat been out of place?’ I say: ‘1888.’ ‘1988?’ ‘No, 1888.’ Then the conversation was over. Uninsurable.”

Elsen said he understood that some people in the exclusive central area of Amsterdam around the Prinsengracht canal had complained that the boat was an eyesore. “Other people think it’s a beautiful boat. They think it’s terrible, just like me, that it disappears from this place,” he said.

To move the Dogger under the canal bridges, a large part of it will have to be dismantled. “The boat is, as it were, peeled off, undressed,” Elsen said. “This is archaeology. Some things go to landfill, other parts we keep because I think they are historically interesting.”

Lillian Huizinga, who lived in the boat between 1985 and 1992 with her sons and her then boyfriend, said: “People were already saying to me: are you going to live in that old corpse? But I really enjoyed being here. My sons and I wanted to say goodbye. They grew up here.”

The only thing that should influence the news is the news

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US ship unable to get Solomon Islands' permission to dock, says Washington

Reuters

A United States coast guard vessel was unable to enter Solomon Islands for a routine port call because its government did not respond to a request to refuel and provision, a US official said.

The Solomons government did not immediately answer a Reuters request for comment. It has had a tense relationship with the US and its allies since striking a security pact with China in May.

The USCGC Oliver Henry was on patrol for illegal fishing in the South Pacific for a regional fisheries agency when it failed to obtain entry to refuel at Honiara, the Solomons' capital, a US coast guard press officer said in an emailed statement.

The vessel was diverted to Papua New Guinea instead, the official said.

The British navy declined to comment on social media reports that Solomon Islands port access was also not forthcoming for patrol vessel HMS Spey - also taking part in monitoring for illegal fishing in the economic exclusion zones of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

"Ships' programmes are under con-



▲ A US coast guard ship. The USCGC Oliver Henry diverted to Papua New Guinea, a coast guard official said, after it was unable to get permission to dock in Solomon Islands. Photograph: Joshua Martinez/US coast guard/EPA

stant review and it is routine practice for them to change," a Royal Navy spokesperson said in an emailed statement. "For reasons of operational security we do not discuss details."

The Solomons' government and

Beijing have ruled out a Chinese military base on the islands, although a leaked draft showed the security agreement would allow the Chinese navy to dock and replenish.

The fisheries agency for the Pacific

Islands Forum, a block of 17 Pacific nations, has a maritime surveillance centre in Honiara, and holds annual surveillance operations for illegal fishing with assistance from Australia, the US, New Zealand and France.

The Oliver Henry had been scheduled for a routine logistics port call in Solomon Islands, said Kristin Kam, public affairs officer for the US coast guard in Hawaii.

"The government of the Solomon Islands did not respond to the US government's request for diplomatic clearance for the vessel to refuel and provision in Honiara," she said in a statement.

"The US Department of State is in contact with the government of the Solomon Islands and expect all future clearances will be provided to US ships."

HMS Spey had Fiji navy officers on board as it worked alongside long-range maritime patrol aircraft from Australia and New Zealand and the US coast guard in the operation to gather information for the Pacific Islands Forum fisheries agency, the Royal Navy said in a statement on Thursday.

It carried out inspections of suspect vessels in ports as well as boardings at sea, it said.

The Royal Navy spokesman said it "looks forward to visiting the Solomon Islands at a later date".

The lesson from Joe Biden's student loan forgiveness? Go big or go home

Hamilton Nolan

Politics is not like regular life; it's worse. Things that are held as treasured virtues in the normal world are often political liabilities. We've all just been served with a shining example of how reflexive moderation - which is good when estimating measurements for recipes, or having drinks at a work party - becomes the tendency of a political fool. The well-being of countless Americans has long been sacrificed on the altar of moderation by the Democratic party, and all the Democrats win for it is maximal disgust.

This week Joe Biden announced that he will be canceling \$10,000 in federal student loan debt (or \$20,000 for Pell grant recipients) for people who earn under \$125,000 a year. This policy is both unquestionably wise, and unquestionably a half-measure. There has long been a movement on the left to cancel all student debt, and even Democratic stalwarts like Chuck Schumer and Elizabeth Warren were pushing for the cancellation of \$50,000 in debt. Joe Biden was pulled towards this action, in large part, by his inability to get other, bigger economic policies through Congress. But even in taking unilateral action, he has succumbed to the overwhelming tendency of Clintonian Democrats to cut any good policy idea in half and call it political wisdom.

And what did Biden earn for his



▲ 'Biden is acting like a man who is forced to rush into a burning building to save two kittens, and decides to break it up into two trips so his arms don't get tired.' Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

unforced, personal decision to keep this program much smaller than it could have been? Within a day, mainstream Republican pundits and politicians called the policy an executive "coup", "an abuse of the law", "utterly revolting", and a "fuck you to every financially responsible person". Republicans in Congress screeched that it would cause wild and uncontrolled borrowing, and Mitch McConnell, predictably, called it "socialism".

In other words, Republicans - whose party has spent the past 50 years single-mindedly crushing worker

power and funneling all of our nation's proceeds to the rich - suddenly became very concerned that this policy might be regressive in its benefits. The party that prevented the passage of any broader measures that might have relieved not just student debt, but housing and healthcare costs and poverty wages, is now alarmed that this policy does not address all of those other matters. Republicans have taken one day off of trying to eradicate labor unions and destroy public education and put poor people in jail to theatrically moan about how this is unfair to all of the

hardworking folks who didn't go to college. Whatever.

Here is the very simple lesson to take from this episode: you will get all of the backlash whether you do a little, or a lot. So do a lot. What is this loan forgiveness policy really driving at? It is, at its core, one small step on the road to a world in which America has free, high-quality, public higher education for all. We are not dreaming of a world in which student loan debt is somewhat smaller, but rather a world in which student loan debt does not need to exist. That is the goal we should

reach. When, after many years of struggle, we get a chance to take a step down that road, *make it a big step*. To do otherwise is stupid. By slashing the debt relief number far down from what it could have been, Biden is acting like a man who is forced to rush into a burning building to save two kittens, and decides to break it up into two trips so his arms don't get tired. Hey, buddy: let's just get this thing done all at once.

Incredibly, this basic truth of how politics works seems to forever elude Democrats. The issue of healthcare is an obvious parallel here. Free public healthcare - Medicare for all - is the intuitive, compassionate and eminently achievable goal that all of our peers in the wealthy western world have already built. So naturally, that goal is considered a fringe position in the Democratic party. Instead, Democrats have spent decades in the excruciating process of building and defending Obamacare, an insufficient half-measure that has cost the same amount of political capital and prompted the same amount of political opposition that Medicare for all would have, while leaving in place most of the ruinous flaws of our broken system. This resolute determination to never propose full solutions to our problems is proudly embraced by Democratic leadership and packaged into campaign ads as "reasonableness" and "moderation".

Of all of the perversities in American politics, the most frustrating is

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its conviction that idealism is a weakness. The conflation of defeatism with wisdom means that expressing the belief that we should just do what needs to be done in order to make the

world a just place is enough to convince the political world that the speaker is a rube. This is ironic, because the very opposite is true, as anyone who has ever accomplished something ambitious can tell you. There is nothing more foolish than negotiating against

yourself. That woeful quality has long been the hallmark of Democrats, who are like timid children who long to express themselves but are too scared to ever stray from the tepid crowd.

What do we need? Public ownership of public goods for the public ben-

efit. Public education, public health-care, public transportation, public art. We are all the public, and helping the public is good. That's called socialism, folks. Republicans will accuse the Democrats of it no matter what. Might as well stop shuffling along, and

get right to it.

Hamilton Nolan is a writer based in New York

Lachlan Murdoch v Crikey may turn out to be a misconceived adventure in reputation repair

Richard Ackland

Lachlan Murdoch was never much of an inspirational figure in the pantheon of news publishing, having secured his place at the helm of Fox News by a process of primogeniture. His defamation action against Crikey, a relatively modest but worthwhile online subscription news and commentary service, reveals much – about ego, the drift of American politics and media, and defamation law itself.

It seems incongruous that the chief executive of the most watched cable network in the US and co-chairman of News Corp, with its global stable of newspapers, would be so troubled by an opinion piece published down under.

Succour has been added to the calls for an inquiry into the influence in this country of the Murdochs and the concentration of mainstream media voices. The process of pretrial discovery could produce hitherto unknown information about the operations of Fox News that, at the least, prove embarrassing to the proprietors and further fuel a backlash against their corporate interests.

There is a sense among those who have watched the evolving litigation at 10 paces that here is someone whose own very skewed and shouty media organisation can dish it out with impunity, but he can't take it if a minnow does the same.

It's not an attractive quality, not that unattractive qualities necessarily tip the balance in a defamation court.

The Crikey article written in June by journalist Bernard Keane has long been forgotten by its readers, which is not to say that it wasn't well crafted. It discussed the evidence of former White House aide Cassidy Hutchinson to the January 6 House select committee, and in the process Keane made comparisons between presidents Trump and Nixon.

It ended with this paragraph: "If Trump ends up in the dock for a variety of crimes committed as president, as



▲ 'Lachlan Murdoch's defamation action against Crikey reveals much – about ego, the drift of American politics and media, and defamation law itself'. Photograph: Stephanie Keith/Getty Images

he should be, not all his co-conspirators will be there with him. Nixon was famously the 'unindicted co-conspirator' in Watergate. The Murdochs and their slew of poisonous Fox News commentators are the unindicted co-conspirators of this continuing crisis."

Lawyers for Lachlan Murdoch say the article and related social media posts convey "highly defamatory and false imputations about him", attributing 14 separate meanings to those words, including: that he illegally conspired with Donald Trump to overturn the 2020 presidential election; illegally conspired with Trump to incite an armed mob with murderous intent to march on the Capitol; was aware of how heavily armed many of the attendees of the rally actually were; has conspired with Trump to commit the offence of treason against the United States; and so on.

Some of these will fall by the wayside as the case progresses, if it does progress, and Crikey will produce some of its own meanings and other defences – including the new and as-yet-untested 2021 defence of public interest

reporting.

Despite the reassurance about an improved legal landscape for publishers, there are still plenty of tripwires in the legislation on which a good media case can founder.

Quite apart from a federal court predisposition, which media respondents detect as "chilly", there is growing judicial impatience with time and resources squandered by cases such as Clive Palmer v Mark McGowan, where "the game has not been worth the candle".

Peter Bartlett, a seasoned defamation lawyer who has acted for Crikey for many years (although lawyer Michael Bradley is reportedly representing the company in this case), has said that much worse has been published by the Washington Post, the New York Times and the ABC about Fox News propagating Trump's "big lie".

So how much damage has Crikey really caused the media heir and beneficiary?

Crikey has mounted a plucky "bring it on" campaign, with advertisements and other articles about Fox News'

"existential threat to US democracy".

The broadcasting leviathan is going through a difficult readjustment at the moment and this may account for some of the local sensitivity. The network has been backing away from Trump and Lachlan Murdoch has distanced himself from the former president.

While Trump may be on hold, the network still embraces Trumpism – which is its cash cow.

Fox is also confronting billion-dollar US lawsuits over election fraud claims from voting machine technology companies Smartmatic and Dominion. The companies allege Fox News amplified false claims that they had rigged the election so as to deprive Trump of victory at the 2020 presidential election.

Murdochs senior and junior are expected to appear at a deposition hearing this month as part of the applicants' discovery process.

It is already well known that Tucker Carlson, the network's star peddler of false or debunked claims, had been undermining the work of the House January 6 committee – and by that process he implicitly sugarcoats the

mob's violent attempt to overturn the election result.

While Fox Business aired early public hearings of the committee, Fox News refused, instead relying on Carlson's unfounded claims that federal agents stoked the violence.

The New York Times wrote of Carlson's Trumpist advocacy: "He has aggressively defended the insurrectionists who stormed the Capitol on 6 January – an attack that Mr Carlson, borrowing the former president's 'deep state' canards, has portrayed as a false-flag operation masterminded by the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

And: "[Carlson] forged a relationship with Lachlan Murdoch, the Murdoch family's heir apparent, who would become his most public supporter at Fox."

Given the astonishing list of Carlson's false or debunked claims, it is awkward in the extreme for Lachlan Murdoch to keep TV host on his payroll while at the same time claiming himself to be a victim of falsehoods.

At first blush there seems to be plenty of material to mount a strong defence to Murdoch's claim. And it will be interesting to see how the applicant, hypersensitive as he appears to be, fares under sustained cross-examination.

Quite possibly, this case might lie alongside Wilde v Queensberry, Porter v ABC, Streisand v Adelman – misconceived adventures in reputation repair.

In the meantime, Crikey is not wasting a good defamation case. A campaign sees new subscriptions pouring in and the till filling with fresh cash for the fight ahead.

At first blush there seems to be plenty of material to mount a strong defence to Murdoch's claim

Ground control to Major Truss – what planet are you on? Does it have a price cap?

Marina Hyde

"Cost of living" is an expression now

used so frequently, including by those in positions of power, that it's possible to end up forgetting how incredibly bleak those words are as a concept.

(See also: "human resources".) Maybe we should revitalise the cliché by calling it the "price of existing" crisis. It is, after all, a perfectly matter-of-fact

way of suggesting that there is a point at which many may simply find it too expensive to endure. People generally make too much fuss about clichés, but

– in one of the very richest countries in the world – this one does feel worth ur-

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gently denormalising.

So who's going to do it? Liz Truss?! The light from even the stars we can see without telescopes can take years to reach us – sometimes thousands of years. On Tuesday Truss was in the West Midlands, with the public able to look at an emanation from her that read: “I will support businesses to get our economy firing on all cylinders – delivering growth and opportunity in the West Midlands and beyond.” How many years ago were these words beamed out? This morning the energy price cap hit £3,549. You sense West Midlands businesses – to whom the price cap doesn't even apply – would like to know how on earth they're supposed to afford to switch on the cylinders at all.

Back on planet Earth, Whitehall has drawn up plans for energy-intensive firms to power down this winter. The single swinging lightbulb in Liz Truss's head seems to have flickered on overnight, resulting in an article for the Daily Mail in which she explains: “My immediate priority will be to put more money back in people's pockets by cutting taxes.” The latest forecasts hazard that inflation will hit 18% in early 2023. The price cap prediction for April is currently at £6,823. Which would certainly change a lot of things, among them the working definition of the word “cap”. The political reality is that a Truss administration would have had to make a number of era-defining interventions by that point – and the no-handouts posturing will seem like a relic of a distant time.

Yet realities are unfashionable. Realities have not been discussed in front of



▲ *‘The suspicion with Truss is that she is – above all – keen to be seen as a particular type of person. This is a vanity we cannot afford.’ Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA*

the public, either by Truss or Nadhim Zahawi, the otherwise invisible supporter of hers who has just happened to be chancellor of the exchequer for the entire summer. Maybe this is the logical political end of a culture that polices spoilers more effectively than burglary or sexual assault. The government simply doesn't wish to ruin people's panic attacks for them.

Truss has instead preferred to spend weeks banging on about small government, which is obviously partly a function of being technically still in a race. But the suspicion with Truss is that she is – above all – keen to be *seen* as a particular type of person. This is a vanity we cannot afford. Boris Johnson's need to be seen as a certain

type of person was behind all of his fatal pandemic dithering and mistakes – and, ultimately, behind the partygate culture that did for him in the end. This week, one of Truss's campaign advisers chirped to the Financial Times: “We have to end this idea that Britain is broken, and tangibly improve people's lives. If we can show people that the government is on their side, everyone will be in a better place come the new year.” Is this the new year when inflation could be running at 18%? Righto. See you there!

The UK needs a titanic figure; it feels like it's getting a Titanic one. Truss is the relentlessly perky crew member trying to disguise the rush for the lifeboats as proof the cruise firm's shore

excursions are extremely popular. Appearing unable to engage realistically with the various crises simply emphasises her smallness.

Take one campaign aide's revelation this week that “she will focus on doing fewer things and doing them better”. In which universe? In a truly ideal world, governments would be able to get out of people's lives, things being so well arranged that they were not much required. But these are not ideal times, and won't be for the foreseeable, so wasting the entire contest on positioning feels a pointless indulgence, and proof her party membership's tiny electorate are the wrong people to have everyone else's future in their hands.

Wherever you stand on the ideal

size of government, the first principle of why governments exist is for people's safety and security. The next government – by all forecasts, Truss's government – is going to have to get right inside people's lives. Her entire leadership pitch puts me in mind of another cautionary cliché: life is what happens while you're busy making other plans. Don't forget that barely a year ago we were being informed that we were about to embark on a roaring 20s. Then again, two years ago we were hearing how Covid would usher in a new social contract.

As for the next wildly overoptimistic promise to be broken, who can say? On that note, we'll play out with another Truss word-signal being received on Earth on Wednesday: “If elected prime minister, I will turbocharge the economies of places like Norwich, Great Yarmouth and across East Anglia, by unleashing the private sector with tax cuts and better regulation ...” Reading this, I was reminded of the notion that the stars whose light is reaching us now are actually already dead. That may be a scientific myth – but it contains much political truth.

Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist

What Just Happened?! by Marina Hyde (Guardian Faber, £18.99). To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at the Guardian Bookshop

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‘Look closely and there’s a tear in Armstrong’s eye’: the Apollo space missions as you’ve never seen them before

You have to make time for awe and wonder. When you're working in space, you're so mission-focused, you can almost forget your environment. It can be hard to process the remoteness and isolation until you get back to Earth.

The cover image of Apollo Remastered, a new book of restored images from the Nasa archive billed as the ultimate photographic record of humankind's greatest adventure, is of Commander Jim McDivitt looking up on Apollo 9 in 1969. I think a lot of people read awe and wonder in his face, but I see immense concentration; he's docking the lunar module. When you're docking, you're using a robotic arm to grab another visiting vehicle, and it's the most intense 90 seconds of your life. Everything depends on you.

Apollo 9, 7 March 1969 James McDivitt docks the lunar module – ‘an almost impossible task’, according to Russell Schweickart, who took the picture. Photograph: Nasa/JSC/ASU/Andy Saunders

Where I do see that awe and wonder is in a picture of Neil Armstrong moments after his historic moon walk. He's back in the capsule and his face says:



▲ *Apollo 9, 6 March 1969 Russell Schweickart's photograph of David Scott in the command module hatch. Photograph: Nasa/JSC/ASU/Andy Saunders*

“Oh my God, what have we just done?” He looks as if he's probably finding it quite hard to process. You see a lot of posed pictures of him, but the smile here is so genuine. Imagine knowing you're the first human to set foot on another celestial body. Look closely and there's a tear in his eye.

Apollo 11, 21 July 1969 Neil Armstrong photographed by Buzz Aldrin moments after their historic moonwalk. Photograph: Nasa/JSC/ASU/Andy Saunders

I was born in 1972 into a world where humans had walked on the moon. My mum loved space, so we

watched all the space shuttle launches on television together. I remember seeing grainy images of Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the moon's surface. The incredible engineering accomplishment that Apollo 11 represented opened me to the potential that we could do anything.

When I look at these remastered images of the Apollo missions, I'm reminded of what I experienced during my six months in space. Take the light. There's no white like that on Earth. I love seeing it coming through the capsule window and striking the astronauts' faces. There's a picture of Com-

mander Wally Schirra on Apollo 7 and the light hitting him is the whitest you'll ever see. The sun's light is a nuclear fusion reaction and the purest white in the universe. It isn't yellow like we see it, or hazy – Earth's atmosphere makes it look like that.

Apollo 13, 15 April 1970 Fred Haise tries to sleep in the cold lunar module. Photograph: Nasa/Andy Saunders (digital source Stephen Slater)

Similarly, because of the lack of atmospheric haze, the clarity with which you can see in space is incredible. You can see very far and it makes judging distances hard. In the famous picture of Aldrin on the moon, the first thing those photons of light from the sun are striking is his suit. Look at his visor and you clearly see the lunar lander, the flag, and Armstrong taking the shot. There's no haze, no dust. Because of that there's no scattering of light, so the shadow is crisp and sharp.

This is what triggered so many conspiracy theories. People thought: “That's the light you get in a studio.” And they're right, but you don't get that outdoors on Earth. For me, that's what's so authentic about these pictures. I think: “This is what I relate to. This is space.”



Gemini XII, 11-15 November 1966 Buzz Aldrin takes the first selfie in space. Photographs: Nasa/JSC/ASU/Andy Saunders

Being launched into space is a violent experience. A vast amount of energy is expended as you get up to 25 times the speed of sound. You are very aware you're entering another realm. So when the engines cut out and you go into weightlessness, it's an experience of complete tranquillity. You think: “Wow, we've made it.” Photos of Earth from space capture the stillness you feel as you orbit the planet.

Earthrise is one of the most famous photographs in our history. Just for fun,

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try turning the page 90 degrees to the left: that's the orientation at which the Apollo 8 crew, who took this picture, would have actually seen Earth as they popped out from behind the moon, with Earth's north pole at the top. The orientation in the book is what we are all familiar with.

Apollo 8, 24 December 1968 Earthrise, taken by William Anders on the first crewed mission to go 'round the moon and back', as Nasa put it. Photograph: Nasa/JSC/ASU/Andy Saunders

What strikes you from space is that Earth is like no other planet we've seen. Even from hundreds of thousands of miles away you just know: there is a planet teeming with life. Against that vast black backdrop, it's so beautiful and fragile.

When I look at static images of Earth, my mind recalls just how dynamic it looks from space. Every orbit, it changes. And we did pretty much 3,000 orbits. In springtime, when the rapeseed across Europe is in bloom, the continent turns into a wash of yellow. And then in winter, it can be a real muddy brown. You see so many thunderstorms at night.

Apollo 9, 6 March 1969 David Scott reflected back at himself in Russell Schweickart's visor. Photograph: Nasa/JSC/ASU/Andy Saunders

There were a few things we'd always call one another over to see. Volcanoes erupting. Auroras, because they are spectacular and sometimes would stretch up to the space station and we'd be kind of flying through them. I remember seeing an incredible algae bloom in the Black Sea. A couple of big icebergs floating around in the South Atlantic.

The space station can be quite a busy place with all the radios and cameras on, and six or seven of us on it. Often I'd be the last one up, switching off the lights. It became part of my evening routine to go to the cupola window and look out at Earth while I was brushing my teeth. It was amazing to have that as my evening view.

I love the photographs of the astronauts in the capsule, too. You go from the vastness of space to these claustrophobic structures in which we have to seal ourselves in order to survive out there.

Gemini IV, 3-7 June 1965 In James McDivitt's photograph - the first portrait taken by another human in space - Ed White leaves the craft. Photograph: Nasa/JSC/ASU/Andy Saunders

When the hatch opened for me to do my spacewalk, I felt a sense of elation. We'd been in our spacesuits for six hours and done so much preparation, then suddenly it was just the two of us in the airlock. We went down the vacuum, opened the hatch and just kind of relaxed.

I think that's probably what the Apollo 11 crew would have felt, too. Can you imagine, after all the fatalities the space programme had endured to get there, suddenly there was this moment where they'd made the landing and all they had to do was just go outside and walk on the moon? I'm sure they were feeling: "We've done it." Not just them, personally, but we, as in humanity.

Apollo 16, 23 April 1972 'Leaving it was an emotional moment,' Charles Duke has said of this family photograph. Photograph: Nasa/JSC/ASU/Andy Saunders

We were lucky to have a 10-minute period on our spacewalk where we had to wait for the sun to set, so it was

forced upon us to just float in space. It was such a liberating experience. On one side, you look down on Earth, then you flip on your back and you're looking up at the Milky Way. All the time with no forces on your body whatsoever. It's incredibly serene but you're also constantly aware of the danger and isolation, and a feeling of massive exposure.

It's fun to see in the early spacewalk photos how they had this "umbilical" cord keeping them attached to the spacecraft. It makes them look a little bit lost. Like they're swimming in space. Nowadays you don't see that. We're always holding on to something or tethered by a four-foot strap.

Apollo 17, 13 December 1972 Eugene Cernan's picture of Harrison Schmitt peering into a vast crater. Photograph: Nasa/JSC/ASU/Andy Saunders

I've always been somebody who tries to keep things in perspective but going into space changes your outlook and thoughts about mortality, about spirituality. On my spacewalk, I thought about us being small and insignificant - that's what you naturally think when you see Earth as this tiny oasis of life in a vast universe. But from a scientific point of view, our body is made out of different elements that have been put together in a certain order, and every one of those atoms was forged in the universe, in stars. Now we've got to a position where we can form complex intelligent thoughts about who we are and where we come from, and develop instrumentation like the James Webb Space Telescope to understand that. And it makes you think: "We're not small and insignificant; we're the consciousness of the universe." The visual experience - whether being up there in space or looking at these pictures -

allows you to contemplate that.

One of the most poignant images for me is of the family photo Charlie Duke left behind on the moon. He wrote on the back: "This is the family of Astronaut Duke from Planet Earth. Landed on the Moon, April 1972." They really maximised the scientific return of those Apollo missions; to suddenly see this, it's like: "Yes, but don't forget we are human." *As told to Candice Pires*

'They help us imagine making the incredible journey ourselves'

By Andy Saunders, who restored the archive

The original Nasa photographic film from the Apollo missions is some of the most important in existence. To maintain its condition, it is securely stored in a freezer in Building 8 at Johnson Space Center, Houston. It never leaves there - in fact it rarely leaves the freezer. The images it contains include the most significant moments in our history, as humankind left our home planet for the first time.

As the original film lay in its frozen vault for half a century, almost all the Apollo images made publicly available have been copies of master duplicates, or copies of copies, leading to a gradual degradation in quality which has only accelerated with the prevalence of digital representations of these images online.

Apollo 16, 23 April 1972 Charles Duke snaps John Young as he collects moon dust. Photograph: Nasa/JSC/ASU/Andy Saunders

In recent years, however, the original film has been removed, thawed, cleaned and scanned to an unprecedented resolution. There is a huge treasure trove of around 35,000 photographs, most of which are rarely seen, in part due to the quality or exposure of

the original film. It's easy to forget they were taken in an era when photography was purely analogue, requiring light-sensitive chemistry, film and paper. Digital scans of the transparencies are often underexposed and difficult to process. The images shown here are derived from new, high-resolution scans of the original film, painstakingly restored using image-enhancement technology. They offer an intoxicating mix of the pioneering, pre-digital 1960s era, capturing stunning otherworldly vistas, pre-computer-designed spacecraft and technology. The technical proficiency in their taking, combined with the quality of the equipment used, produced images so crisp, they border on the surreal.

Apollo 15, 2 August 1971 One of the most reproduced Apollo images is David Scott's of James Irwin saluting the US flag. Photograph: Nasa/JSC/ASU/Andy Saunders

They help us gain an understanding of the endeavour, and imagine making the incredible journey ourselves. To glimpse the hostile environment, before opening the hatch and stepping out. To marvel at the grandeur and scale as we stand on the edge of huge craters and rilles, and gaze up at towering mountains, absorbing the magnificent desolation of this alien world. Or simply observe - as Neil Armstrong and his fellow space explorers descend the ladder, and peer through the lenses of their cameras. https://twitter.com/AndySaunders_1

● This is an extract from Apollo Remastered by Andy Saunders (Particular Books, £60). To order a copy for £52.20 go to guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

'We're dwindling like the salmon': the Indigenous nations fighting for water rights

Gabrielle Canon

In the Bay-Delta, the watershed formed by the two mighty rivers at the heart of California's water system - the Sacramento and the San Joaquin - signs of worsening climate conditions intensify year after year.

Once abundant species of plants and animals that call these spaces home are disappearing. Flourishing toxic algal blooms threaten the health of the rivers and the people who live near them. As temperatures surge, there's even less water to go around.

Much of the crisis is caused by climate breakdown, but decades of overuse have made issues worse as larger shares of water are diverted to supply agricultural land and urban consumption. California water authorities have been slow to implement key rules even though they are required by law to review the regulations every three years. Key updates have lagged for decades.

Now, a coalition of Indigenous nations, frontline communities and environmentalists has come together, hoping to spur state water officials to secure not just their water rights but their civil rights. The two, they say, are inextricably tied.



▲ Malissa Tayaba hovers on a sandbank formed along the Sacramento River, which has been hit hard by drought and overuse. Photograph: Gabrielle Canon/The Guardian

"Everything we need comes from the river," says Malissa Tayaba, a leader in the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians. "Water is alive. And we can't live without it."

'If the salmon are going extinct, so will we'

Tayaba's ancestors stewarded these shores for thousands of years before white settlers pushed them from their villages and divvied up the rights to the river resources. In 2021, Tayaba and her tribe were able to repurchase the land, but in recent times, the watershed's ecosystem has dramatically changed.

Far more water is taken out of the rivers than is sustainable, according to state scientists. Consumers' water rights in the San Joaquin and Sacramento River basins account for five times the amount of water that actually flows through them. In dry times, between January and June, more than 70% of the water can be diverted from the system.

Meanwhile, roughly 95% of historic wetlands in the delta have been lost, water pollution has caused calamity, and species that once flourished across the 61,000-square-mile watershed are

collapsing. Among them, the Chinook salmon are dramatically declining. Known as Nur to the Winnemem Wintu Tribe, they are not only an essential resource but part of the culture.

"We used to be 20,000 people along the river and we're dwindling out like the salmon," said Chief Caleen Sisk in a statement following the petition filing. "We only have 126 members of the Tribe left and so if the salmon are going extinct, we can only guess that so will we."

The only way to slow the devastation, the tribes and environmental groups say, is to enact stricter regulations curbing water use.

In May, the Winnemem Wintu Tribe and the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians along with the environmental groups Save California Salmon, Little Manila Rising and Restore the Delta filed a petition that formally requests the board update its water quality control plan, which regulates how much water must stay in the system.

"What is at stake? Our people literally are at stake because they sit on the land and they are in the ground already," Tayaba said "You lose your culture. You lose ties to your people - that's genocide."

'Hopelessly out of date'

But creating and enforcing new restrictions is a complicated affair.



▲ Tayaba stands against a tree where her tribe performs ceremonies. Photograph: Gabrielle Canon/The Guardian

Powerful California water districts supply drinking water to residents and the rights provide essential hydration to the state's agricultural industry - which produces over a third of the country's vegetables and two-thirds of its fruits and nuts.

State leaders have long believed that voluntary agreements and negotiations between the board, water districts and senior rights holders are the best way to avoid years - or even decades - in litigation that stalls progress.

But key stakeholders, including environmental groups, Indigenous nations and fishing industry representatives, have been missing from the agreements. The state's strategy, advocates say, continues to build on the systemic racism baked into the water rights system itself, which historically

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barred access to Indigenous peoples and communities of color.

“There couldn’t be a more glaring example of systemic racism than that water rights – the senior ones – could only be planted by white people,” said Jon Rosenfield, a senior scientist at San Francisco Baykeeper. He and his organization have long fought for these regulations and have thrown their weight into the campaign.

Advocates and experts say there’s little time to lose. Although protecting the delta is one of the board’s top responsibilities and state officials have cast it as a priority, the water quality control plan standards have not updated since 1995.

The plan is “hopelessly out of date”, said Richard Frank, professor of environmental practice at the University of California, Davis, School of Law.

Frank, who was appointed by the former governor Arnold Schwar-

zenegger to serve on a taskforce examining solutions to the delta crisis in 2006, said the regulations were “in dire need of being updated”.

“A lot of climate scientists believe we are lurching into a new normal of severely restricted water availability that makes the ongoing problems of the delta that much more severe and that much more dire,” he said.

‘The threat of cultural genocide’

The board agrees – but still denied the coalition’s petition for immediate action. Edward Ortiz, a board spokesperson, said it had plans to move forward, but at its own speed. The agency expects regulations to be put in place within two years – allowing ample time for negotiations and voluntary agreements recently developed by the California natural resources agency, California department of fish and wildlife, California department of water resources, and public water agencies to be concluded.

These agreements would encourage

rights holders responsible for the water diversions to help improve flows and habitat restoration without the need for stringent regulations, state officials argue.

Coalition members see the agreements as a way the board can allow more diversions before the board rules on how much water needs to stay in the system. On Monday, they again requested the board reconsider its timeline.

“The way water is being removed from the system is creating a constellation of harm that most significantly affects frontline communities,” said Sydney Speizman, a student attorney at the Stanford University Environmental Law Clinic, who worked with the coalition to petition the board. On the legal front, she is challenging the board’s right to federal funding for actions that have discriminatory outcomes. “This isn’t a story about agriculture versus fish,” she said, adding that this was in every way a justice story that show-

cased “all the ways the crisis in the delta poses the threat of cultural genocide”.

‘Not just a California issue’

Adding to the concern is the state’s plan to re-engineer the delta, a project expected to add new complications to discussions and regulations. The multibillion-dollar Delta Conveyance, a 45-mile tunnel that would reroute water from the Sacramento River into the delta to supply farms and cities, has been touted by the governor as a strategy to secure the water supply.

A pared-down version of a plan championed by the former governor Jerry Brown and scrapped by Newsom in his first days in office, the new delta tunnel project has still raised ecological concerns, especially because it is being explored ahead of new water quality standards.

In the state’s first report, released late last month, officials note the tunnel could pose more problems for endangered fish, including the delta smelt, winter-run Chinook salmon, and steel-

head trout. That means it would also affect the tribes and other frontline communities that depend on them.

Completion of the project would take decades, and significant challenges – along with securing permits and funding – remain.

For 18-year-old Danielle Frank, a Hoopa tribal member and the youth coordinator for Save California Salmon, there’s no time left to waste. The pangs of a rapidly declining delta are felt daily and she’s already been robbed of some aspects of her tribes’ cultural traditions that rely on the declining fish populations and water quality.

“These rivers are drying up because America was founded on genocide and the removal of Native people from their land,” she said. “Issues like these aren’t just California issues, they are happening across the United States. There needs to be a change nationwide – that’s going to be the only way.”

Elijah who? The amazing new stars of The Lord of the Rings

Tom Hiddleston

If there’s one thing we know about The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power, it’s that this eight-part series is big. Filmed in New Zealand and on a rumoured budget of \$1bn for seasons one and two, the show sports massive battle sequences, hordes of marauding monsters and special effects that will make Peter Jackson’s films of JRR Tolkien’s trilogy look like DIY fringe theatre.

But for all its monumental scale, Rings of Power is still a story about characters: from haughty elves to ale-swilling men, from thatch-bearded dwarves to a new race of eco-friendly proto-Hobbits called Harfoots. The cast that showrunners JD Payne and Patrick McKay have assembled is remarkable: a lineup that is short on bankable names (unless you count Lenny Henry) but huge on talent and promise, from indie movie mavens to theatrical darlings, from dashing former child actors to (at least) one alumnus of that *other* fantasy franchise, Game of Thrones.

We sat down with four of them – two elves, a dwarf and a man – to find out how this epic was forged, and whether they’re ready for fan-screaming stardom...

‘We somehow got this golden ticket’ Morfydd Clark

Embarking on any major creative project is a leap of faith. For the Welsh actor Morfydd Clark – star of indie horror Saint Maud – that leap was larger than most. “I moved to New Zealand without knowing which character I was playing,” she says in disbelief. “That seems insane now. All I knew is she was an elf. I never for a moment thought that it could be her.”

Luckily for Clark, *her* turned out to be Galadriel, the elf queen immortalised (in all senses) by Cate Blanchett in the films, and perhaps the most rounded of all Tolkien’s women. How did Clark feel about slipping into the silk robes of one of the world’s most venerated actors? “I didn’t try to get away from it! I’ve watched those films



▲ New kids on the block ... Morfydd Clark as Galadriel and Robert Aramayo as Elrond in *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*. Photograph: Amazon Prime Studio undefined

three times a year since they came out. I’ve got them memorised.”

But, she reveals, this is a very different elf than the one we met in the movies. “The show takes place thousands of years before The Lord of the Rings. Middle-earth is experiencing peace, which doesn’t happen very often, and Galadriel doesn’t feel at ease with it. She feels the shadow rising.”

This sense of a world on the brink was easy to conjure for the cast and crew, as New Zealand became an oasis of sanity during the pandemic. “It was very surreal,” says Clark. “We were very far away from home, with everyone we loved experiencing something awful while we’d somehow got this golden ticket. So we were carefree to a degree, but there was always a glass ceiling to our happiness.”

Surely you have to laugh when you’re confronted by an actor in a 3ft beard waving an axe around? “Of course! Getting the giggles on set is always equal parts terrifying and hilarious, but when you’re with an elf, a dwarf and an orc, it’s pretty special. I’d have a really scary scene with all these terrifying creature actors, then it’d cut and they’d go (she adopts a perfect Kiwi accent): ‘Mate, I need my protein smoothie!’”

The world of Middle-earth is also, famously, a fount of tricky-to-pronounce names, something the actor is

all too familiar with. “It was suggested at drama school that I change [my name],” she says. “There was this idea that someone called Morfydd would only get cast as Welsh people. To which I said, well, that would be fine! But, to be honest, it’s nice to have a name that takes people a bit of effort. The English, though, can get a bit scared. It’s fine, guys, just go for it!”

‘My Dad wishes I played for Barcelona’ Robert Aramayo

At its heart, The Lord of the Rings is a story of fate, destiny and being in the right place at the right time. Hull-born actor Robert Aramayo can relate. “The first book I ever read was The Hobbit. Then when the movies came out I was so excited I’d play Lord of the Rings in the playground. Elrond [Lord of the elf kingdom of Rivendell] was the one character who always really intrigued me. Who is he, where does he come from? And then all of a sudden, I’m on a plane to New Zealand.”

But again, this is a very different version of the character from the one played by Hugo Weaving in the films. “Elrond’s not a lord yet,” says Aramayo. “He’s young, at least for an immortal. Every elf around him is older. He’s inexperienced, but he’s curious.”

Aramayo was cast as Elrond when another actor, Will Poulter, was forced to drop out, and it’s a big step up for a performer whose CV includes a smattering of supporting roles, notably

as the young Ned Stark in Game of Thrones. Not that Aramayo lacks expertise: at just 19, he won a scholarship to study at arguably the world’s most prestigious acting academy, Juilliard. “I had no idea of the magnitude of what was happening,” he says. “I didn’t know I’d end up staying in New York, that it’d become my home. I just thought it’d be cool. Getting Lord of the Rings was similar. They were both just these incredible things that happened.”

I tell him I found an article from the Hull Daily Mail in 2011, crowing about teenage Rob’s Juilliard place and quoting his dad saying: “It’s like hearing your son has been picked to play for Barcelona.” Aramayo laughs. “I’m sure my dad still wishes I played for Barcelona! But my parents are very supportive. And I’m proud to be from Hull. It’s where I discovered I wanted to do this for a living.”

So how does a young actor prepare for the very real prospect of becoming the most famous person from their home town? “Ha!” he snorts. “I think the Beautiful South and Tom Courtenay might have something to say about that!”

‘They built a flap in my costume so I could breastfeed’ Sophia Nomvete

An experienced theatre performer with only one TV credit to her name (Captain HeyHo in the CBeebies’ pirate show Swashbuckle), Sophia Nomvete is preparing to see her level of fame skyrocket. She plays Princess Disa, not only the first female dwarf to be seen in Middle-earth but the first Black woman of any note. “This is it!” she beams. “I spent 16 years rolling up my sleeves and learning my craft, now I’m in this bonkers situation where I get to be the poster child for a revolutionary piece of TV.”

Not that she’s expecting it to be easy: online trolls have rushed to criticise the casting of non-white actors. “I’m human,” she says. “I’m not immune to all that. But Disa is an absolute force. She’s a titan. And I’m already getting feedback from other women saying: ‘I see myself in her, my little girl sees



▲ Creature feature ... An orc in *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*. Photograph: Amazon Prime Studio undefined

herself. It’s all about redressing the balance.”

Nomvete’s journey to a career-defining fantasy role hasn’t been straightforward. “Never in all my years did I think anything like this would be possible for me. I’m a plus-size, curvaceous woman of colour, so there just hasn’t been that much opportunity. Then at the first audition, I was weeks away from giving birth! But the character breakdown said they wanted someone warm and maternal, so I thought: ‘Well, I don’t know how much more maternal it gets. Let’s go for it!’”

When they flew to New Zealand, Nomvete’s daughter was 10 weeks old, leading to a whole new set of challenges. “They built a flap into my costume, so there were literally times when I’d have the baby on my boob, I’d go: ‘Right, are we ready to shoot? Great,’ and I’d take her off. But that’s how it should be. We can do it too!”

‘They didn’t even give me a prosthetic nose or ears!’ Maxim Baldry

Of all the Rings of Power cast, Maxim Baldry is the only one disappointed by his experience. “When I first got into makeup I was so excited,” he says. “What am I going to get? A prosthetic nose? Ears? Wig? Teeth? And they said: ‘Well, you already look like Isildur,’ so all they did was give me a bit of a shave and kick me out of the trailer.” On the plus side, won’t that mean he’ll be one of the more recognisable cast members? “I suppose so. It’d be weird if I couldn’t still go to the pub, though. Hey, that’s when I can use the prosthetics!”

He’s kidding, of course – like his col-

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leagues, Baldry's experience of filming the show was pretty near perfect. "I'm a hardcore fan," he says. "The films were part of my DNA growing up." His character will grow into someone who has a significant role in the One Ring's jour-

ney to its place in the more well-known Lord of the Rings stories. "But right now he's a young sea cadet from the island of Numenor, which is Tolkien's Atlantis. It's a beautiful place but it's stagnant, and he's hungry for change. He's at a crossroads." That feeling is one Baldry can relate

to, because acting isn't his only love. "I'm also in a band, called Terra Twin. It's nice to have something outside of acting. This job can take over your life, so having another outlet is really refreshing. The ideal would be to spend six months filming then head off across Europe in a little van with my friends."

Is he familiar with the dubious history of actors in bands, from Keanu Reeves's little-missed Dogstar to Russell Crowe's gnarly pub-rock outfit 30 Odd Foot of Grunts? "Yes, but it's not all bad!" he says. "Have you heard David Duchovny? He's great! And Jessie Buckley got a Mercury music prize nomi-

nation!"
The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power's first two episodes are on Prime Video from 2 September, with new episodes released weekly

'What game is he playing?': Lachlan Murdoch, Trump's election lies and the legal fight against a small Australian website

Ben Doherty

Rupert Murdoch, so the aphorism goes, doesn't sue. But his eldest son, it appears, is cut from different cloth.

Lachlan Murdoch is headed to Sydney's federal court, launching a defamation action this week over a news article, not involving his considerable Australian media empire, but instead Fox News's reportage of the feeble denouement to the Trump presidency and the January 6 insurrectionist storm of the US Capitol.

In what is being portrayed as a David and Goliath clash between the billionaire and Crikey, a small Australian independent news website, Murdoch's 40-page statement of claim alleges Crikey has falsely impugned he had illegally conspired with the former US president Donald Trump to "incite a mob with murderous intent" to march on the US Capitol on 6 January, and that he should be indicted as a traitor.

Murdoch, the chief executive and executive chairman of Fox Corporation in the US, is already involved in a monumental \$1.6bn defamation lawsuit in the US - on the other side of the bar table - defending allegations by Dominion Voting Systems that Fox News pushed false claims of voter fraud in the 2020 US presidential election in relation to Dominion's voting machines.

But the Australian suit has opened up the possibility that Fox's reportage of the Trump presidency and its aftermath, and the corporation's links to Trump himself, will be publicly aired in forensic detail in a court 15,000km away.

In starting this suit, Murdoch has invited scrutiny of his own organisation's actions and reportage, a potentially high-risk strategy that will not be totally under his control. It has left some to ask: "What game is he playing here?"

Without doubt, it is a supremely high-risk strategy for Crikey too, facing a financial cataclysm if the case is lost. On Friday the site launched a GoFundMe page seeking donations for its legal fees, telling readers "Lachlan Murdoch has unleashed his legal and financial forces against us".

Suing where he believes his chances are greatest

At issue is an analysis piece written in June this year by Crikey's political editor, Bernard Keane.

The piece does not name Lachlan Murdoch individually at any point and is, in large part, not about the Mur-

doch family, its empire, or its news businesses. It is concerned with evidence given by the former White House staffer Cassidy Hutchinson to the US House select committee on the January 6 insurrectionist assault on the US Capitol building.

Hutchinson did not say the name Murdoch in her evidence.

Keane's alleged defamation does not occur until the final two paragraphs of the piece.

Having discussed Trump's tenacious promulgation of what commentators have dubbed the "big lie" that he won the 2020 US presidential election - he lost by 306 electoral college votes to 232, and the popular ballot by 7m votes - Keane argues "the world's most powerful media company" continues "to peddle the lie of the stolen election and play down the insurrection Trump created".

Keane then draws an analogy between the former US president Richard Nixon - infamously the "unindicted co-conspirator" in the Watergate scandal - with "the Murdochs", arguing they "and their slew of poisonous Fox News commentators are the unindicted co-conspirators" in the events of January 6.

It's a strong line, and seeking to make such an analogy is newsworthy (if perhaps deserving of greater exposition than two unexplored paragraphs at the tail end of an article).

But an editor put the "unindicted co-conspirator" phrase into the headline. Murdoch's people saw it. A five-page letter of concern was fired off within 24 hours.

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After weeks of increasingly intemperate legal letters back and forth, Crikey went nuclear, goading Murdoch by taking out advertisements - in the New York Times and the Canberra Times - literally inviting him to sue, and publishing all the legal correspondence on its site.

Legal sources have told the Guardian that Crikey's bombast left Murdoch feeling he had "no other option" but to sue, and that he is determined to see it through.

And so it has come to this, the steps of Sydney's federal court, in the jurisdiction of New South Wales, the famed "defamation capital of the world" - a sobriquet so earned because it is seen as the most applicant-friendly anywhere.

The alleged role of the Murdoch media in contributing to fanning the flames of insurrection that led to January 6 have been extensively canvassed in the US and elsewhere, but presumably he is suing in Australia because that is where he believes his chances are greatest.

Murdoch's statement of claim states he seeks damages because, through the publication and republication of the article, he "has been gravely injured in his character, ... and has suffered and will continue to suffer substantial hurt, distress and embarrassment".

He is also seeking aggravated damages, with the claim also alleging Crikey had published the parties' legal corres-

pondence as a strategy for self-promotion and commercial gain, while "falsely suggesting that Murdoch was being unreasonable in his conduct towards them to settle the dispute, in circumstances where he repeatedly told them that an apology was the only further step that needed to occur for the matter to resolve".

He has one of Sydney's most high-profile defamation barristers, the sharp-elbowed Sue Chrysanthou SC, representing him.

Crikey says the imputations asserted by Murdoch are "contrived" and his response "bullying" and an "abuse of media power". The publisher has retained Michael Bradley. The managing director of Marque Lawyers does not have a prominent history in defamation law, but is an experienced lawyer (if occasionally irreverent, he describes himself on his own website as a "shameless self-promoter"). The correspondence revealed this week by Crikey shows he is clearly up for the fight.

Crikey is painting this not only as a battle for its very existence - "the best way to support independent media is to become a member", the co-founder of publisher Private Media, Eric Beecher, beseeched - but also as a broader fight for free journalism itself.

"We didn't start this senseless altercation with Lachlan Murdoch. We may not be as big, rich, powerful or important as him, but we have one common interest: we're a news company that believes in publishing, not suppressing, public interest journalism."

The 'public interest' defence

Dr Andrew Dodd, the director of the Centre for Advancing Journalism, told the Guardian a legal showdown between the minnow and the monolith has been looking "increasingly inevitable for some time".

Dodd, who has worked for both the Murdoch-owned News Corp newspapers and for Crikey, says Crikey's editorial position has become more trenchantly left wing, and has increasingly come to see its role as an unafraid and independent media organisation holding influential institutions like Fox and News Corp to account.

Beecher, in particular, has been a decades-long campaigner against Australia's acute concentration of media ownership (65% of national and city daily newspapers are owned by Murdoch).

"This is a defining issue for [Beecher]," Dodd says. "It's wrong to characterise this as simply a commercial exercise. There is a marketing element - Crikey taking on the Murdochs - but this is a marriage of deeply held principle and a commercial decision."

Dodd argues there is an irony in Lachlan Murdoch wanting to claim to have been identified in the Keane article (when the only reference was to "the Murdochs", taken by many to refer primarily to Rupert) but not to confront the criticisms within the piece - that Fox's coverage, and continued succour to the lie of the stolen election, had played a role in fomenting the discontent that inspired the January 6 insurrection.

"What game is he playing here? Is he wanting to beat his chest and say 'I am in charge'. Well, if he is doing that, he should also man up and be responsible for the editorial output of his news organisation, which has a lot to answer for - despite what he might say - a lot to answer for in relation to its coverage in the lead-up to what happened on January 6.

"Lachlan has been very thin-skinned, unable to take one-tenth of the criticism that his organisation dishes out daily."

Dodd argues, too, that Murdoch the younger's actions reflect a "brittle culture ... deeply ingrained in the psyche of News Corp".

"News doesn't like a pesky small player like Crikey, it runs contrary to the monopolistic idea at News Corp that small players don't have legitimacy. And when Crikey is kicking it in the shins in the irreverent way that it does, that is triggering for News Corp."

Others with knowledge of the companies and their histories have de-



▲ Fox Corporation executive chairman Lachlan Murdoch has launched defamation action against Australian independent news website Crikey. Photograph: Brendan McDermid/Reuters

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scribed Crikey’s strategy as “bold” and potentially catastrophic. Picking a fight with the Murdochs will have undoubtedly driven subscriptions, but a loss could end it, or wound the company so greatly as to change it irreparably.

Crikey and Lachlan Murdoch have form. It is the fourth time in five years that Lachlan Murdoch has threatened to sue Crikey: in April last year Crikey had to run an apology at the top of its homepage for 14 days after a piece on Murdoch was shown to contain a series of errors. A year earlier, Crikey was forced to apologise for incorrectly comparing Murdoch to an organised crime boss.

Dr Matthew Collins QC, the president of the Australian Bar Association and a defamation law expert, says the fundamental legal question to be considered by the court is “what does the ordinary reasonable reader of the Crikey piece understand to be conveyed by the piece”.

“And here, what’s interesting is that Lachlan Murdoch is not named – the reference is to Murdoch and to Fox News, and the imputations derive mostly from the heading and that single sentence at the end.”

Perhaps counterintuitively, having written less, rather than more, about Murdoch, leaves greater scope for argument about what the article conveys to a reader.

Collins argues “there are very serious questions about whether the imputations are, in fact, conveyed, and serious questions about whether the article sufficiently identifies Mr Murdoch

in circumstances where he hasn’t been expressly named”.

And he argues the case is ripe to contest the newly introduced “public interest” defence in NSW defamation law: a defence to the publication of defamatory material if the issue is of public interest and it was reasonably believed the publication of the matter was in the public interest.

There is a political element at play too, with a renewed push for a judicial inquiry into media concentration in Australia, aimed largely at the Murdoch empire. And two former prime ministers of Australia have long railed against what they perceive as Murdoch’s malign influence on the Australia polity and public.

Malcolm Turnbull this week called the Murdoch lawsuit “hypocritical” on radio, saying “very few people have defamed more people than the Murdochs over the years, their media organisations”.

“They’re always bleating about freedom of speech and how the defamation laws are too harsh, and they stifle free speech.”

And, Turnbull told the ABC, “January 6 could not have happened without the toxic influence of Fox News”.

‘Censorship should be resisted’

But the timing of this suit is intriguing as Lachlan Murdoch finds himself on the other side of the bar table, on the other side of the world, on the very same issue – the 2020 US election.

In Delaware, Murdoch is defending a \$1.6bn defamation action, brought by Dominion Voting Systems, over Fox’s post-election coverage.

Dominion has alleged that Fox

News broadcast claims it knew to be untrue about the validity of the 2020 presidential election result, alleging that Dominion’s voting technology had fraudulently stolen the election from Trump. Dominion’s suit alleges several of Fox’s hosts repeatedly claimed, without evidence, Dominion’s voting machines were faulty, deliberately rigged to disadvantage Trump, or affected by “technical glitches” that distorted results.

Dominion successfully argued Fox News’s parent company, Fox Corporation, should be enjoined to the litigation because its two most senior executives, Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch, allegedly played “a direct role in participating in, approving and controlling” reportage that amplified false perceptions of voter fraud.

“Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch allegedly made a ‘business calculation’ to spread former President Trump’s narrative through Fox News even though they did not personally believe it,” Delaware superior court Judge Eric M Davis said, ruling that the action against Fox Corporation could proceed.

He determined that Dominion’s allegations “support a reasonable inference that Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch either knew Dominion had not manipulated the election or at least recklessly disregarded the truth when they allegedly caused Fox News to propagate its claims about Dominion”.

Dominion is confident. “The truth matters,” the company’s lawyers wrote in their initial complaint.

“Lies have consequences. Fox sold a false story of election fraud in order to serve its own commercial pur-

poses, severely injuring Dominion in the process. If this case does not rise to the level of defamation by a broadcaster, then nothing does.”

Fox has defended its coverage on first amendment grounds: “A free press must be able to report both sides of a story involving claims striking at the core of our democracy.”

The cases could impact upon each other: Murdoch will have in his possession the court material from the US case, which Crikey could potentially seek to obtain to use in its Australian defence.

Lachlan Murdoch being on the opposite side of the cases on opposite sides of the globe, the cases expose the glaring difference in the operation of defamation laws in the US and Australia.

Defamation is regarded as significantly harder to establish in the US system: public figures in America suing for defamation must prove that false statements were published maliciously. That is with prior knowledge they were untrue or with reckless disregard for whether they were true.

In applicant-friendly Australia, there is no “public figure” defence, nor a constitutional first amendment-like right to free speech. Critics of Australia’s laws say they are poorly drafted, and work neither to protect the private right to a reputation nor the public right to freedom of speech and of the press. Some defences, such as honest opinion and qualified privilege, are almost unworkable in Australia. But there have been recent reforms: this case will likely be one of the first tests of Australia’s new “serious harm” test which

will oblige Murdoch to demonstrate his reputation was damaged by the article, or Crikey’s actions thereafter.

Private Media, the company that owns Crikey, is valued at less than \$20m by its own reckoning. It is supremely cognisant of – indeed relishing – its role as David to the Goliath of the Murdoch empire, worth billions. It sees a significant part of this battle as being played out, not in the staid surrounds of the federal court, but in the court of public opinion.

In the legal correspondence with the Murdochs that Crikey published this week, it quoted Lachlan’s own words back at him. In his 2014 Keith Murdoch Oration (Keith Murdoch was his grandfather), Lachlan Murdoch argued “censorship should be resisted in all its insidious forms”.

“We should be vigilant of the gradual erosion of our freedom to know, to be informed and make reasoned decisions in our society and in our democracy.”

When Crikey is kicking it in the shins in the irreverent way it does, that is triggering for News Corp

Andrew Dodd

The million year ice project: the quest to find the oldest ice on Earth

Jo Chandler

The photo that pops up with his periodic tweets is something of a non sequitur. Joel Pedro – “Lead Project Scientist, Million Year Ice Core Project, Australian Antarctic Division” – sits at the wheel of a Massey Ferguson tractor that’s seen better days, flannel shirt sleeves rolled to the elbow. Behind him there’s a glimpse of pale acres of rye grass – fodder for cattle grazed on his late grandmother’s property in Walpole, on the Western Australian south coast.

Click through to his profile and the farmyard shot is juxtaposed with one rather more in keeping with his polar credentials. Here he’s perched on the wide tracks of a beast of an all-terrain vehicle in a dazzling icescape. Swaddled in a goose-down jacket, he’s smiling broadly behind a frosty beard and wraparound shades.

The two photographs riff on a remarkable journey – from tractor to polar tracks, third-generation farmer to glaciologist. It would seem fair to characterise this as an unlikely life trajectory. But google Pedro’s hometown, and the tourist hyperbole would imply it was destiny. “North Pole, South Pole, WALPOLE!” Still, what are the odds?

Conjuring a little more synchronicity, it’s worth observing that the



▲ Joel Pedro, the lead scientist on Australia’s million year ice core project, at the East Greenland camp in Antarctica in 2016. Photograph: Jorgen Pedder Steffensen

fortunes of Pedro’s settler-farmer forebears were always at the whim of weather. He grew up through an era of declining winter rainfall across the region. And as is now understood – thanks to the work of the same glaciologists whose ranks he’s joined – these conditions are entwined with mighty forces stretching across the Southern Ocean and deep into the ice. When circulating winds send moist, warm air down to East Antarctica – delivering higher snowfall to the coast near Casey station – they tend to cycle back dry, cool air and create drought in south-west Australia. Ice core records indicate this strengthening pattern is likely not a natural event but a consequence of human influence on the climate.

And this is the business Pedro

has found himself in, extracting relics of history from the ice, “these really tightly connected components of the climate system – temperature, carbon dioxide, sea ice, ocean circulation – all so exquisitely and tightly linked together,” Pedro explains. “It’s something that comes out of paleoclimate science in general. The closer you look, the more everything is linked together. And it only takes quite small changes to trigger cascading things.”

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As an undergraduate at the University of Western Australia, he “teetered on the brink of working on the salinity problem in WA”. But at 41, Pedro be-

longs to a generation weaned on warnings about rising temperatures.

In his lifetime, levels of atmospheric carbon have skyrocketed. A fascination with atmospheric chemistry – “not so much the white-lab-coat chemistry ... rather the more adventurous side of it” – prompted Pedro to apply on spec to the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) for some postgrad work. “They were looking for someone to work on reconstructing solar activity from ice cores using a cosmogenic isotope. And I kind of knew nothing about that, but thought it sounded pretty cool.”

Pedro drove his panel van across the Nullarbor, and 20 years and a few twists and turns later, he’s leading Australia’s full-throttle return to deep-field Antarctic science, heading its most ambitious and costly over-snow expedition in a generation. The objective is to set up a camp in the high interior of the East Antarctic Ice Sheet and drill a hole almost 3km deep. Over the next several summers, the crew will return to extract, catalogue and preserve three-metre lengths of glacial ice laid down over a million years, pushing through the moment when something cranky, dramatic and mysterious happened. Entrenched rhythms in and out of ice ages blew out, catapulting the planet into a profoundly different state.

Understanding just what happened way back then promises critical clues about conditions of life on the next Earth, the one human emissions are



▲ ‘North Pole, South Pole, Walpole!’ Antarctic researcher Joel Pedro on a tractor on his family’s Western Australian farm

now conjuring into an ever-spiralling reality.

“What we’re trying to do here is understand where the tipping points are in the climate system,” says Pedro. What was going on in the atmosphere in the past, in particular with greenhouse gas levels? What was the solar story?

If we have this information, he says, “then we have a firm handle on these guardrails of where the climate system is stable and where it tips. And obviously what we’re looking at for the future is how far we can push the climate system before it tips into another state.”

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or paying \$1,000 an hour. Signs are not encouraging. Earlier this week, Jared Kushner, whose own

father received a Trump pardon, scrambled to distance himself from Ivanka's dad. Asked by Fox News about Trump's handling of classified material, Kushner

demurred. "Like I said, I'm not familiar with what was in the boxes," he answered. "But I think President Trump, he, uh, he governed in a very peculiar way and when he had his documents,

I'm assuming he did what he thought was appropriate." And if Trump can't count on his son-in-law to deliver something other than a potpourri of word salad, who can

he trust? Lloyd Green served in the Department of Justice from 1990 to 1992

Women behind the lens: silent and alone, Nur hopes for a greener future

Ishrat Fori Imran

Nur Asma is 10 years old. She lives in the Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, with her family. She has four siblings; she is the third child in the family.

Nur loves creative play - crafting, making horses and utensils out of mud, making a chicken coop from bamboo, that sort of thing, and she loves studying too. She is very shy and introverted. She does everything silently and plays alone. Perhaps she just loves spending time alone. She is a girl who wants to create something new by herself and doesn't want to copy from

others. While I was talking this picture, I was totally surprised to see her playing like this with trees. She collected the caps of water bottles to plant things in. She hopes to grow many trees because there have been accidental fires in the camp, and a lot of trees have burned down. People in the camp suffer a lot due to the unbearable heat, especially

in summer, so the Rohingya here plant as much as they can, hoping to create a fresh green environment with cool space under the trees. Nur has seen her grandmother plant trees near to their shelter, so she is doing the same - even though it seems as if she is only playing. Ishrat Fori Imran is a Rohingya refugee photographer who uses a smart-

phone to document life in the camp. Her work has featured in Rohingya-tography magazine *Sign up for Her Stage to hear directly from incredible women in the developing world on the issues that matter to them, delivered to your inbox monthly:*

Northern Ireland hopes Game of Thrones prequel will see fans return

Rory Carroll Ireland correspondent

In 2019, Northern Ireland seemed set for a sunlit future of Games of Thrones-themed tourism. Devotees of the HBO fantasy series flocked to the show's locations in castles, forests and harbours, spending £30m each year, with more expected once an official studio tour opened in County Down.

Then, to paraphrase the show's trademark phrase, winter came. The eighth and final season disappointed fans, cooling ardour for the franchise. Then Covid-19 hit, freezing international travel. Tour companies went into hibernation. Now, with this week's launch of the show's prequel, House of the Dragon, and the recovery of international travel, Northern Ireland hopes to bask again in the reflected glory of Westeros.

"We're all hopeful that the Game of Thrones world will get its mojo back with the new show," said Rob Dowling, managing director of Game of Thrones Tours, which runs coaches from Belfast and Dublin. "It went through a very painful phase for a few years when nobody had anything good to say about it. Season eight was a huge disappointment," said Dowling, echoing accusations that the original show lost its edge by letting so many protagonists survive. "People felt it had sold out." The first episode of House of the



▲ The numbers of visitors wanting to see the Dark Hedges and other Game of Thrones locations dipped in 2019 and has not recovered. Photograph: Max Shen/Getty Images

Dragon - which airs on Sky Atlantic in the UK - won largely positive reviews and stoked hopes that it will capture the spirit of George RR Martin's sprawling novels. "There is a history of these big franchises recovering," said Dowling, citing Star Wars. From 30 coaches a week in 2019, his company now runs just seven. But Dowling is optimistic about a rebound. This week he took bookings for next year: "It's only August. I've never seen that before." He was unsure whether to credit

the new show, the end of travel restrictions or the opening in February of the Warner Bros and Linen Mill Studios' studio tour in Banbridge, a 110,000-square-foot immersive experience that includes sets, props and scale replicas of the frozen North, King's Landing and other settings. Brad Kelly, the studio tour's general manager, said visitor numbers rose this summer. "Whether it's seasonal or the new show, it's hard to say at the moment. Our hope is that the show will draw the global audience back into the

world of Game of Thrones." House of the Dragon was filmed in England, Spain and Portugal - not Northern Ireland - but Kelly said Northern Ireland's landscape was stamped in the fictional world of Westeros: "It's a character." The studio hopes to exhibit props and costumes from the new show in the near future. Meanwhile, HBO is considering another spin-off show focusing on the character of Jon Snow. Tour operators are crossing their fingers for an upsurge. Norman Reilly,

owner of Taxi Tours Belfast, said the numbers of visitors wanting to see the Dark Hedges and other locations had not recovered since 2019. "We're hoping that will begin to change." Caroline McComb, director of McComb's Coach Travel, predicted that the prequel, which focuses on the Targaryen dynasty, would boost numbers. "It keeps Game of Thrones in the forefront of people's minds, and that can only be a good thing." This week, Belfast International Airport displayed a willow throne - a replica of the Iron Throne that was woven in 2019 and which usually resides at the Ulster Museum - to promote the spin-off. The museum has also put back on display an 87-metre woven and embroidered Game of Thrones tapestry that was made in 2017. Elio Garcia, who helps run the fan site Westeros.org, welcomed any boost to the region's tourism. "We've been to Northern Ireland several times ... [and] were impressed by how the tourism and screen boards, and above all the locals, embraced the show. We're glad to hear that tour operators are starting to see an uptick ahead of the new show." Garcia said he would like to return to Northern Ireland despite his disappointment with Game of Thrones. "I would still gladly visit myself to check out the studio tour, even though my own issues with the show led me to stop watching part way through."

Sanna Marin party row reflects Finland's low threshold for scandal

Minna Ålander

Sanna Marin has been the focus of

unusual - by Finnish standards - international attention ever since she became the world's youngest prime minister at the age of 34 in December

2019. Not every Finnish prime minister makes it on to the cover of Time or has their holidays reported on in Italian national newspapers.

Raised in modest circumstances by her mother and her mother's female partner, Marin worked in her 20s as a cashier in a department store. Now, as

well as prime minister, she is mother to a young child, has a social life and

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occasionally goes to festivals and parties. For the more conservative parts of society, all that seems hard to combine in one person.

It was not only Marin who made headlines when she took office, but her whole government: in addition to her Social Democratic party, the four other coalition parties (the Centre party, Greens, Left Alliance and Swedish People's party) were female-led – and four of the five party leaders were under 40.

Young women lead Finland and, according to polls, a majority of voters approve. Biannual polling for Helsingin Sanomat, Finland's largest daily newspaper, shows the Marin government has enjoyed record high approval ratings. Starting at 73% in 2020, by December 2021 during the second year of the pandemic its rating was at 48% – still higher than the highest rating of any other Finnish government since 2011 – and in June this year it was back at 58%.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that misogyny and sexism have become a thing of the past in Finland.

In their pettiness, many of the frequent so-called scandals that have driven the media frenzy around Marin – there was a "Breakfastgate", over her breakfast expenses; a row over her habit of doing the cleaning in her official residence herself; other parties – smack of misogyny and opposition to



▲ Sanna Marin during a press conference in Helsinki last week. Photograph: Roni Rekoma/Rex/Shutterstock

her person rather than her policies.

But the latest "Partygate" is also typical of Finland's very particular culture when it comes to scandals: politicians here are held to very high moral standards, and consequently the threshold for scandals is very low.

In 2014 a male prime minister stirred controversy by wearing shorts to a press conference. In 2008 a male foreign minister was forced to resign over leaked text messages to an erotic dancer. It does not take much to make a scandal in Finland.

This present storm, focused on leaked videos and pictures from parties that Marin attended or gave in her official residence, has now been in the news in and outside Finland for more than a week. International media interpretations have in many cases shown something of a lack of understanding of the domestic political context.

Finland is approaching its next parliamentary elections, due in April next year. The National Coalition party, currently in opposition, has profited

from its position as the only larger party to have supported Finland's candidacy for Nato membership before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and it leads in the polls, just ahead of the Social Democrats. Also in opposition is the Finns party, whose leader suggested Marin should do a drug test (which she did – the result was negative).

The drug allegation, based on a misheard word ("jauhojengi", or "flour gang") in the party video, initially originated from an anonymous message-board well known for its misogyny and

hate speech. (No one in Finland, by the way, would call drugs "flour").

In fact, what this latest controversy – and all the other overblown "scandals" involving Marin – amounts to, and what it should be seen as, is the beginning of a public debate about who a Finnish prime minister can be and how they should behave.

Marin is testing the limits of the institution. Many, especially younger Finns find her much more relatable than most other politicians. Throughout, she has remained unapologetically authentic, refusing to be deprived of privacy and a social life normal for someone in their 30s.

Public opinion is beginning to grow tired of the whole show. After Marin's emotional speech on Wednesday – in which she said she was "human" and needed "joy, light and fun amidst the dark clouds" but had "learned her lesson" – there is now a strong desire to move on to more important topics.

Marin is the first Finnish prime minister to have garnered such a high degree of international attention, even celebrity status. She has chosen to be approachable, is open to posing for a picture, and posts actively on social media herself. And in Finland the prime minister can go to a normal club without fearing for her life.

So if a prime minister goes to a party and nobody leaks a video, did it happen? That should be the question.

'It's a deal with the devil': outrage in Appalachia over Manchin's 'vile' pipeline plan

Nina Lakhani in Monroe county, West Virginia and Oliver Milman in New York

Taking on the fossil fuel industry in West Virginia was always going to be a David v Goliath type battle, but after years of protests, lobbying and lawsuits, 68-year-old Becky Crabtree thought the community-led resistance had beaten the Mountain Valley pipeline (MVP) in a fair fight.

So when news broke earlier in August that the state's fossil-fuel friendly senator Joe Manchin had resurrected the beleaguered pipeline, Crabtree, a high school science teacher who teaches students about the climate crisis, felt "numb".

Manchin, a conservative Democrat who receives more campaign financing from the fossil fuel industry – including pipeline companies – than any other lawmaker in Congress, had agreed to back his party's historic climate legislation before the crucial midterm elections. But only after he negotiated a side-deal to fast-track the MVP.

"It's the unfairness that makes me so angry. It's a deal with the devil," said Crabtree, 68, who owns a 30-acre sheep farm in Lindsie, Monroe county.

The deal is a sweet one for the pipeline's supporters. Democratic leaders agreed to advance separate legislation in September that would "require the relevant agencies to take all neces-



▲ Becky Crabtree on her property in West Virginia: 'It's the unfairness that makes me so angry.' Photograph: Mark Trent/The Guardian

sary actions to permit the construction and operation of the MVP and give the DC circuit jurisdiction over any further litigation".

This could help the pipeline company circumvent judges who have suspended construction and overturned permits over environmental concerns, and have future legal cases heard in an appeals court in Washington, which is considered more favourable to developers.

It's part of a broader set of concessions negotiated by Manchin to diminish environmental protections and expedite permits and construction of pipelines and other energy infrastructure, limiting legal challenges by

concerned communities and environmental groups.

It also mandates new oil and gas drilling deals in Alaska and the Gulf of Mexico – places that environmentalists have also fought in court to preserve. Any public lands given over to solar and wind developments must be accompanied by millions of acres handed to oil and gas – tying the US to planet-heating energy projects for decades.

Brett Hartl, a campaigner at the Center for Biological Diversity, said the side-deal was a "vile tribute" to the fossil fuel industry. "These companies are wrecking our climate and raking in record profits, and more federal help is the last thing they deserve."

Campaigners also warn that the slew of concessions will sacrifice another generation of Black, Latin, Indigenous and low-income communities, who will bear the brunt of air pollution, noise and displacement from the new projects.

Still, many experts argue that the concessions were worth it to secure the country's first ever climate legislation, which provides \$369bn for the transition to electric vehicles and renewable energy – a historic investment that scientists estimate will lead to net reductions of 40% by 2030, compared with 2005 levels.

For those who will be directly affected, the trade-off is a bitter pill to swallow.

Crabtree, who was arrested in 2018 after trying to stop construction on her property by chaining herself to her old Ford Pinto, said: "I understand how compromises work, and I'm glad that we finally got some action on climate change. But our communities and the environment are being sacrificed for Manchin and his friends, and that's painful."

The Mountain Valley pipeline would stretch 303 miles across steep forested Appalachian mountains, farmland and a thousand or so streams, rivers and wetlands, transporting liquified shale gas from north-western West Virginia to southern Virginia.

It will cut through karst terrain –



▲ The Mountain Valley pipeline under construction. Photograph: Mark Trent/The Guardian

complex geological structures created by the breakdown of soluble rocks like limestone and dolomite – characterised by springs, creeks, caves and sinkholes. This Swiss-cheese like underground landscape has blessed the area with abundant water sources, but the porous, unstable nature of the land makes it vulnerable to contamination, according to the US Geological Survey. Recent heavy rains led to mudslides and slippage across the region, and pipeline opponents argue that putting anything volatile in the ground is too risky.

The company said it had "worked diligently to identify a route that poses the least overall impact on communities, cultural and historic resources, and environmentally sensitive areas, including karst topography regions".

Of big concern is Peters mountain – a sprawling peak covered in oak, maple and hickory trees with sheer drops,



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endangered species and breathtaking views that straddles state lines to Virginia. The pipeline would cut across the imposing mountain, which supplies clean drinking water to just over half of Monroe county residents.

“Just because Joe Manchin wants to fast-track this fossil fuel infrastructure, the facts haven’t changed. The violations, inconsistencies and holes in the permitting are still there. This land is very vulnerable, the threat to our water supply hasn’t changed,” said Howdy Hennis, 82, a clean-water advocate and small landowner in Greenville, Monroe county, who relies on spring water.

“Hearing the news was like getting sucker-punched. I will never vote for Manchin again.”

But others such as Bill Shiflet, a real estate agent, farmer and chair of the Monroe county building commission, support Manchin’s deal, and believe environmental concerns are “unfounded”.

He said: “We have pipelines all over this country. Once the gas is flowing, Mountain Valley will bring in game-changing amounts of money through severance and property taxes, and will allow us to sell West Virginian gas to our allies in Europe ... Shutting off fossil fuels now would be very bad news,

we’re not ready.”

The project is over budget, behind schedule and currently at a standstill because it does not have the necessary permits to cross waterways and wetlands – which Manchin wants to sidestep. Earlier this week, the company was granted a four-year extension, until October 2026, to complete the project. (The company claims that roughly 94% of work on the MVP is complete, but according to calculations by environmental groups the true figure is closer to 55%.

On the other side of Peters mountain in Giles county, Virginia, Georgia Haverty, 82, owns 500 acres with pick-your-own apple orchards, a restaurant, a wedding venue and doggy daycare. In recent years, extreme and unpredictable weather patterns have led to crop failures, which Haverty believes underscores the urgent need to transition away from fossil fuels. “Sacrificing the planet for bigger corporate bank accounts is not a reasonable tradeoff. The problem is we’re Appalachian, [and] we don’t have any political influence,” he said.

The pipeline industry’s financial influence in Washington, however, is growing.

So far this year, the industry has donated \$331,000 to Manchin – up from \$20,000 in 2020, according to federal

campaign finance disclosures tracked by Open Secrets. Four Democrats are among the top 20 industry beneficiaries, who include Manchin, who has received more than the next five lawmakers put together, as well as Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona and Chuck Schumer, the Senate leader from New York who negotiated the deal for Manchin’s vote. Since 2017, Schumer has also raised at least \$281,000 from the country’s largest utility, NextEra Energy, a stakeholder in MVP.

A spokesperson for Manchin said he has “always been in full compliance with ethics and financial disclosure rules” and “always had West Virginia’s best interest in mind”. Schumer’s office did not respond.

Haverty said that if she’s learned one thing from fighting the pipeline, it’s that money matters. “If you own something and someone with more money wants it, they will take it – and the facts, regulations and fairness don’t matter. It’s the opposite of the American dream,” said Haverty, who was among 300 residents in Virginia sued using eminent domain powers to force the pipeline on her land. A lawsuit challenging the use of eminent domain for private gain – which under the constitution is restricted to the government taking private property for public use – is ongoing.

But it’s not over till it’s over, and the next stage of this struggle will be over permitting – which the company believes the fourth circuit court in Richmond, Virginia, that has overturned crucial permits suspending construction has got “wrong” and Manchin wants to bypass.

While some Democrats point out lengthy permitting procedures have also slowed renewable energy projects and the transmission of clean electricity across the country, the party’s progressive wing is reluctant to fulfil Manchin’s bargain.

“Polluting industries may have won that promise in a deal with a select few, but I intend to do everything in my power to convince the rest of my colleagues to break it,” said Raúl Grijalva, chairman of the House’s natural resources committee and a congressman from Arizona. Rashida Tlaib, another progressive Democrat, added that given Manchin’s previous political manoeuvres around the climate bill “we owe him nothing now” on permits.

Like the Dakota Access pipeline on Indigenous lands at Standing Rock, the MVP could become a national call to protest, and will then come down to how much political capital and force leaders are willing to deploy. On Wednesday, more than 650 groups sent a letter to congressional leaders, calling

on them to abandon Manchin’s fossil fuel side-deal.

In Montgomery county, it was a wealthy rural neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city of Blacksburg, where residents first mobilised against the MVP almost eight years ago, creating pipeline monitoring networks and legal strategies that morphed into a regional and national movement.

David Seriff, 64, a telecoms account executive, and his wife Bridget Simmerman, 60, a psychotherapist, hosted the first meetings, and over time the pipeline route shifted to avoid some of their properties. “This is a wealthy neighbourhood, we have more influence than others, but we’ve seen outrageous abuse of individual and property rights, it’s so un-American,” Seriff said.

Less than half a mile up a wooded fire access road, piles of the 43in carbon steel pipeline are visible up and down the mountainside, rusting on the deforested corridor since construction was suspended a couple of years back.

Seriff said: “The bottom line is that we don’t need more methane infrastructure. We need to move forward not back. This deal is an outrage but it’s not over. We’re organised and ready, and we’re going to stop this.”

Rising energy bills put millions of UK households at risk of winter catastrophe

Richard Partington, Rowena Mason and Alex Lawson

Millions of households are bracing for a winter catastrophe of rising energy bills that experts say will plunge people into destitution and cause an increase in avoidable deaths without urgent government support.

After Britain’s energy industry regulator confirmed an 80% rise in the consumer price cap from October that will take a typical household’s gas and electricity bill to £3,549 a year, there were stark warnings about its potentially devastating effects.

Charities said the rise would completely “wipe out” the incomes of poorer households, leaving millions with the threat of bills they cannot pay or the choice between heating and eating this winter.

Highlighting the damage to whole sections of the population, analysts at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation said single parents would be forced to hand over almost two-thirds of their income after housing costs to pay energy bills.

The poorest single adults would, they said, see their finances wiped out by “stratospheric” energy bills representing 120% of their income after housing costs, leaving many destitute.

Condemning inaction by ministers, the consumer champion Martin Lewis warned “lives will be lost this winter”.

The latest rise announced by Ofgem highlighted once again a power vacuum at the heart of government as ministers await the conclusion of the race to replace Boris Johnson as leader of the Conservative party.

The Conservatives were in disarray over their response to the price cap on Friday, which will mean typical bills will



▲ Charities said the rise in the energy cap to £3,549 would completely ‘wipe out’ the incomes of poorer households. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

have trebled from a year earlier.

Nadhim Zahawi, the chancellor, suggested people should think about reducing their energy use, but his likely successor, Kwasi Kwarteng, said he was opposed to giving such advice to consumers.

Liz Truss, the frontrunner to be prime minister, also refused to spell out what she would do to help households beyond saying she would “ensure people got the support they needed”, even though Johnson told broadcasters that the next government would “plainly” have to increase cash “handouts”.

The price cap was raised to £1,277 last October and now stands at just under £2,000 after increases this spring. The Russian invasion of Ukraine further added to a dramatic global in-

crease in wholesale oil and gas prices.

Peter Matejic, a chief analyst at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, said of the October increase: “In all my years as an analyst, I haven’t double-checked a piece of analysis as much as this one because it is so staggering, it feels incorrect.

“It is impossible to think a care worker or a shop assistant will have to scramble to find hundreds more pounds to pay for their heating or that the entirety of someone’s income for a whole year will be less than their energy bill.”

Criticising Truss for failing to come up with a plan to tackle “catastrophic” energy price rises, Lewis told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “If we do not get further government inter-

vention, on top of what was announced in May, then lives will be lost this winter.”

The announcement comes as households attempt to budget for a tough winter, with inflation already above 10% driven by the soaring cost of food in shops and record petrol prices. The Bank of England has forecast the latest rise in energy bills this winter will send inflation to a peak above 13%, while some economists forecast it could climb to 18% from January.

The next cap will be introduced in January. The energy consultancy firm Cornwall Insight on Friday raised its forecasts for that announcement to £5,387, from a previous prediction of £4,650, and increased its estimate for the April cap to £6,616, up from £5,341.

Combined with forecasts for next January, the Resolution Foundation said bills were set to be about £2,277 higher than last year at £3,749 – extra money it said people cannot afford.

Torsten Bell, the chief executive of the thinktank, said: “Winter energy bills are set to average around £500 a month, while prepayment customers will need to find over £700, more than half their disposable income, to keep the heating on in January alone. These costs pose a serious threat to families’ physical and financial health.”

Ofgem said it would not give projections for the January measure because the market remains “too volatile” but warned prices “could get significantly worse through 2023”. The new cap will affect 24m households – about 85% of the population.

That number includes about 4.5 million prepayment meter customers, who will pay on average an additional £59 a year.

Jonathan Brearley, the chief executive of Ofgem, told Channel 4 News on Friday night that the regulator had had to make “difficult trade-offs” in setting the new price cap. “[It] was designed to do one thing, and that was to make sure that unfair profits aren’t charged by those companies that buy and sell energy. And, right now, those profits in that market are 0%,” he said.

“What it can’t do is it can’t say given the cost of the energy that we can force companies to get from customers less than it costs to buy the energy that they need, because otherwise they simply can’t buy the energy for those customers.”

Energy cap leap looks to be moment when UK recession fears turn into reality

Larry Elliott Economics editor

The phoney war is over and the real struggle for the economy is about to begin. That is the brutal reality facing the UK as gas and electricity bills rocket this winter.

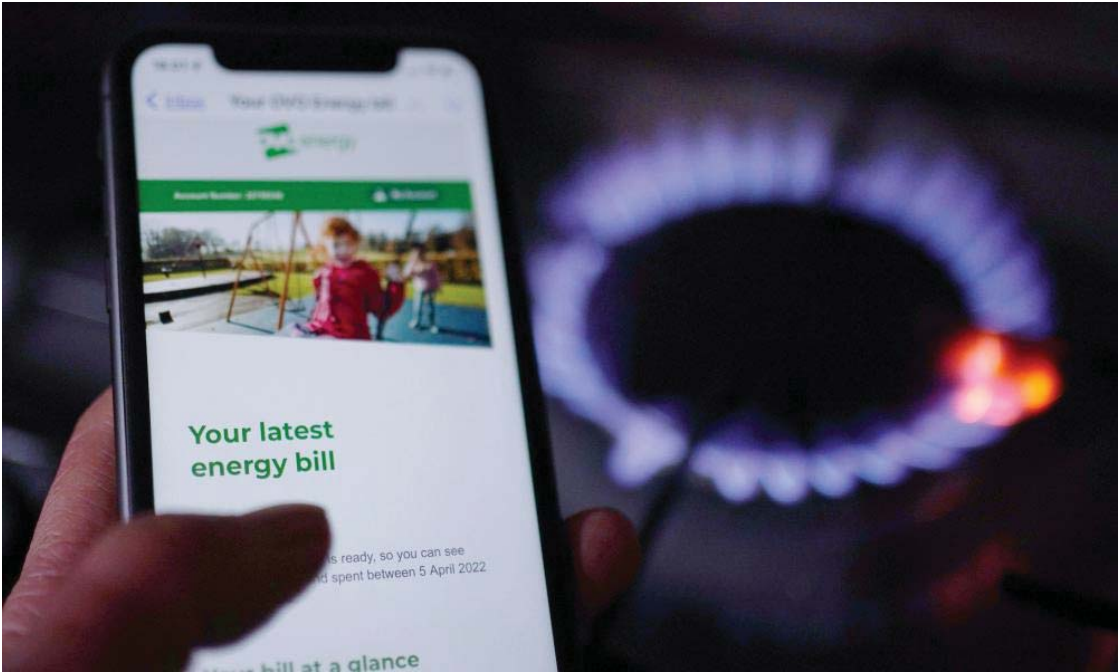
For months it has been clear the energy regulator for Great Britain, Ofgem, would raise its price cap from just under £2,000 a year to about the £3,500 mark and it has duly announced an 80% increase.

Ultimately, rocketing prices will have some beneficial effects. Renewable sources of energy will become relatively cheaper and their use will increase. With Whitehall “war-gaming” a scenario in which there are energy shortages in the months ahead, a higher priority will be given to energy self-sufficiency.

Businesses found ingenious ways of coping with lockdown and some are being equally creative when it comes to cutting energy usage. The crisis may lead to a long overdue stepping up of investment in home insulation.

But none of that will really have much impact this winter, which looks likely to be as tough as anything that was seen during the pandemic – and potentially much tougher.

Consumer and business confidence



▲ Current support packages anticipated a price cap in October of £2,800, not the £3,549 Ofgem has announced. Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

has weakened in anticipation of the higher bills to come but the economy has been marking time. Activity remained pretty much unchanged in the second quarter of 2022, retail sales were up in July and unemployment is close to its lowest levels in half a century.

However, that is all about to change – unless the government comes up with something big in terms of a support

package covering consumers and business. Current support packages anticipated a price cap in October of £2,800, not the £3,549 that Ofgem announced on Friday morning. The idea that prices could carry on rising and stay high for at least the next year was simply not factored into any official economic forecasts.

Soaring energy bills affect the econ-

omy in three key ways. First, they push up the cost of living, with the new price figure adding about four percentage points to the annual inflation rate. The Bank of England has already factored the October increase into its forecast for inflation to reach 13.3%.

Yet with the still rising global cost of gas now putting the price cap on course to breach the £5,000 a year threshold

in January, the increase in price pressures could turn out to be much more significant. Earlier this week the US investment bank Citi predicted inflation would peak at more than 18% next year.

Threadneedle Street has raised interest rates at the last six meetings of its monetary policy committee, and further increases are likely over the coming months.

Second, rising inflation depresses consumer spending. Wage rates have been picking up over the past year as workers have sought to maintain their living standards – but not nearly as fast as prices have been rising. That gap is growing, and with consumers forced to spend more on energy they have less to spend on other things.

Third, businesses are going to be hurt by increased costs and a reduction in consumer spending. The energy price cap only applies to consumers, and many small and medium-sized companies are going to face a triple whammy: higher fuel bills, higher wage bills, and falling demand.

In the short run, the energy price shock will be inflationary. As the months roll by it will become deflationary, leading to slower growth, rising unemployment and business failures. The longer gas prices stay high, the deeper the recession will be.

Snickers bars are being made in Australia again, but ours are 12% smaller

Cait Kelly

Snickers bars are back being made in Australia again, but the beloved chocolate bar has become the latest victim of shrinkflation as the maker looks to cut costs.

Mars Wrigley Australia moved its manufacturing of Snickers bars to China while the company's Ballarat factory was undergoing an upgrade. In August it brought the bars back home – but the higher cost of manufacturing means they have shrunk.

While the chocolates will still cost consumers \$2, the locally made chocolates weigh 44g, compared with the ones produced in China, which were 50g.

Some stores such as Woolworths are still stocking 50g bars, while Coles has transitioned to the 44g bars.

A spokesperson for Mars Wrigley Australia said cost increases were to blame.

“Like many Australian businesses, we are facing unprecedented cost



▲ The Snickers bar has lost 6g in a move back to manufacturing in Australia. Despite being smaller, it will still cost consumers \$2. Photograph: Sammy11/Getty Images/iStockphoto

pressures right across our operations, driven by a range of external factors,”

the spokesperson said.

“While we continue to absorb cost

increases, changes to product weight is sometimes necessary to ensure we

can continue to supply our much-loved chocolate bars to Australian consumers.”

The company did not confirm whether wage differences between the two countries were a factor.

Mars Wrigley Australia is one of the country's biggest alongside Nestlé Australia and Mondelez Australia.

The company had been criticised online for moving the manufacturing offshore in May of 2021, but the spokesperson said it was only a temporary measure while the Ballarat site underwent a \$100m revamp.

“As a proud Australian manufacturer, where possible we make our products locally across our two manufacturing sites in Ballarat and Asquith,” the spokesperson said.

“Our Ballarat factory has been producing some of the country's most-loved brands including M&M's, Maltesers, Mars, Snickers and Pods for more than 43 years.”

The spokesperson would not say if any of these other locally made products had also shrunk recently.

The only thing that should influence the news is the news

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Hungary approves construction of two Russian-built nuclear reactors

Agence France-Presse in Budapest

Hungary has announced that the €12.5bn (£10.6bn) construction of two nuclear reactors by Russia's Rosatom will begin in the coming weeks after regulators approved the project.

The war in Ukraine has not deterred Hungary's interest in the project to add to the four reactors already operating at the Paks plant outside Budapest.

The fact it is moving forward is another indication of the close ties between Hungary's nationalist prime minister, Viktor Orbán, and the Russian president, Vladimir Putin.

"This is a big step, an important milestone," the Hungarian foreign minister, Péter Szijjártó, said on Facebook after the national regulator issued a permit on Thursday after numerous delays.

"We can now move from planning stage to construction. You'll see that at the Paks site in the coming weeks," said



▲ Workers at the Paks nuclear power plant in Hungary, built with Soviet-era technology in the 1980s. Photograph: Tamas Soki/EPA

Szijjártó.

He added it was "realistic" the reac-

tors could enter service by 2030.

The 2014 deal to build two 1,200MW

reactors in Paks, 60 miles (100km)

south of Budapest, will more than

double the plant's capacity.

Built with Soviet-era technology in the 1980s during Hungary's communist period, the plant is the country's only nuclear facility and provides about 40% of its electricity needs.

"In this manner we will ensure Hungary's energy security in the long term and protect Hungarians from wild swings in energy prices," said Szijjártó.

Russia is financing most of the project with a €10bn loan to Hungary, which is paying the remaining €2.5bn.

Finland, an EU member, cancelled a similar Russian nuclear power plant project in May over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Hungary has bucked EU efforts to isolate and sanction Russia. Whereas its EU partners are trying to quickly wean themselves off Russian oil and gas, Hungary has obtained exceptions and has negotiated extra deliveries of natural gas.

The Guardian view on energy prices: time to cap the cap

Editorial

The scale and damage of the body blow to Britain is suddenly and shockingly real. British consumers face an 80% rise in their energy bills from 1 October, the regulator Ofgem confirmed on Friday morning. In just five weeks' time, the current annual energy price cap will balloon from £1,971, which itself seemed a spectacular level when it was set in April, to a barely believable £3,549. This means hardship for all and misery for millions. It is an insufferable event. No decent society can allow it to happen.

The magnitude of the latest leap in prices is not unexpected. It has been signalled for months by a volatile energy market and by Russian geopolitics. It is still a breathtaking threat to ordinary life, a tripling of the price of the average dual-fuel domestic tariff in less than a year. But the impact will soon be greater - and the effects more terrible. In January the cap will rise further, perhaps by the same amount again. In April it will soar yet again.

An alarming prospect is about to become a chilling reality during the coldest months of the year. No one should deceive themselves about either the scale or the urgency, least of all a government whose ministers are apparently so laid-back about the damage to come that none of them did the



▲ Demonstrators rally outside parliament in London against rising household energy bills. Photograph: Wiktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

morning media round to respond to the Ofgem announcement. But if they do not realise that the life and temper of the nation have changed, they will soon find out.

In the not very distant days when energy prices rose more gently than they do now, it was possible to argue that the costs, although steep, could be managed without risking social breakdown. Stock solutions included encour-

aging changes in consumption (as the chancellor, Nadhim Zahawi, briefly attempted on Friday) and targeting support at the most badly affected. But those days are gone. These latest price increases mean that, unless far more radical actions are taken, hundreds of thousands face being cut off and millions will be plunged into intolerable debt. These are morally unacceptable options in a civilised society.

In less than two weeks, Britain will finally have a new prime minister and government. Whether that government is led by Liz Truss or Rishi Sunak, it will have to do far more on day one and in the coming months than either candidate has yet acknowledged. Their respective leadership campaign pledges - suspending green levies and scrapping VAT on bills - are wholly inadequate responses. The tax cuts that

Ms Truss promises to win Tory members' votes are not merely irrelevant to solving the cost of living crisis, but will make it worse.

Long-term answers - more renewables and a sustained energy efficiency drive - are essential parts of the response. But this is now an immediate crisis. It cannot be parked until the energy supply market has been transformed. It requires immediate action as well as generational change. The price of energy must be capped. The cost of doing this must be paid for by increased borrowing and by higher taxes. This is what other European countries are doing. Britain must do so too.

In an ideal world, this would be achieved by large and targeted progressive transfers focused on poorer households, including those in work. In the world we actually inhabit, however, a more effective alternative is to cap all bills and use windfall taxes, higher-rate income and wealth taxes and borrowing to pay for it.

To govern is to choose, it is often said. This is such a moment. The Conservatives must match the crisis with a big and bold intervention to cap the rises. Nothing else will do. If they remain in denial, they will have to give way to a government that is willing to do what is required.

The Guardian view on Alan Ayckbourn: a tonic for sick times

Editorial

The playwright Alan Ayckbourn is a standout figure in British theatre, not least as an octogenarian whose plays outnumber his years. Just as his 86th play finishes its run at a tiny theatre near Whitby, his 87th is about to open 20 miles along the Yorkshire coast in his home-from-home, Scarborough. Meanwhile, down in Sussex, Chichester is warming up for a revival of his 1985 comedy *Woman in Mind*.

What better tonic could there be in this deeply unfunny era than an evening with a consummate craftsman who has spent six decades mining laughter from personal calamity. As a recent Arts Council report spells out, the arts are indeed a tonic, with an important role to play in the mental health of the nation.

As one of the UK's most commercially successful theatre-makers, Ayckbourn might seem an odd figure to focus on. He is not cutting-edge; he is never going to convert an alienated inner-city youth to the joys of theatre-going. But he is also a local hero, who has earned the loyalty of his public by staying loyal to them.

In the gathering storm of shrink-



▲ 'Alan Ayckbourn is a local hero, who has earned the loyalty of his public by staying loyal to them.' Photograph: David Levenson/Getty Images

ing incomes and ballooning overheads, he puts bums on seats both in established arenas, such as the Stephen Joseph theatre, and in small makeshift venues in areas that, in the current but inadequate jargon, may well qualify as culturally deprived. Take the farming community served by the 102-seat Esk

Valley theatre, which has operated from a village hall for the last 17 years and is currently staging Ayckbourn's *All Lies*, directed by the maestro himself.

Esk Valley serves a scattered, predominantly elderly population, which was one of the demographics pinpointed in the Arts Council report. A sense of

social wellbeing was among the key benefits identified by a study which reported that 82% of adults felt arts engagement - whether watching or taking part - helped them to feel connected.

In keeping with a time of social and economic crisis, the report takes

a utilitarian line, focusing on the capacity of the arts to reduce criminality and substance abuse in economically disadvantaged areas. This is valid and politic, but the cited studies tell a richer story of their role in enabling people to "flourish" and to find a meaning in life. Theatre and museum visits make older people, in particular, feel less lonely.

Crucially, the report also points out that the arts are a "perishable commodity". It's no good parachuting in a single razzle-dazzle show or dance masterclass: in order to fulfil their therapeutic potential, they have to be kept going, so that the sense of wellbeing they generate is regularly topped up. Public funding isn't set up to provide such continuity, but the cultural economy often relies on the energy and commitment of individuals, such as the husband-and-wife team - an actor/director and a choreographer - who run the Esk Valley theatre.

They too will need support if they are to weather the economic storm. They may be small but, as their longstanding relationship with Ayckbourn demonstrates, they are a valuable part of a cultural continuum, administering shots of healing laughter that inoculate people against loneliness and despair.

Shia LaBeouf denies he was fired from Harry Styles' role in Don't Worry Darling

Andrew Pulver

Shia LaBeouf has denied that he was fired from the role eventually played by Harry Styles in the forthcoming thriller *Don't Worry Darling*, directed by Olivia Wilde.

According to an email he sent to Variety, the actor said he left the project "due to lack of rehearsal time". He also forwarded to Variety an email he had sent to Wilde in response to her comments about his behaviour on set.

Quoted in an earlier article in Variety, Wilde said that "[LaBeouf's] process was not conducive to the ethos that I demand in my productions ... He has a process that, in some ways, seems to require a combative energy, and I don't personally believe that is conducive to the best performances. I believe that creating a safe, trusting environment is the best way to get people to do their best work. Ultimately, my responsibility is to the production and to the cast to protect them. That was my job."

LaBeouf was originally cast as the



▲ 'Firing me never took place,' said Shia LaBeouf. Photograph: Mark Blinch/Reuters

male lead opposite Florence Pugh in the psychological thriller about a married couple living in a town dominated by a sinister company. He left the role

in August 2020 and was replaced by Styles. Later that year LaBeouf was sued by his former girlfriend FKA twigs for sexual battery, assault and infliction

of emotional distress. LaBeouf's attorney said in a court filing that the actor "denies generally and specifically each and every allegation" in the complaint.

Wilde added: "A lot came to light after this happened that really troubled me in terms of his behaviour ... I knew that I was going to be asking [Pugh] to be in very vulnerable situations, and my priority was making her feel safe and making her feel supported."

In his email to Variety, LaBeouf quotes a message he claims he sent to Wilde: "I am a little confused about the narrative that I was fired, however. You and I both know the reasons for my exit. I quit your film because your actors & I couldn't find time to rehearse."

He adds: "Firing me never took place ... It is not the truth. So I am humbly asking, as a person with an eye toward making things right, that you correct the narrative as best you can."

LaBeouf also included a series of texts and messages between himself and Wilde, which he says shows he left the film voluntarily.

Wilde's representatives have been contacted for a response.

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Can a ‘dark’ Pinocchio reignite Disney’s live-action remake strand?

Ben Child

How do you solve a problem like Disney’s live action remakes? Well, from the Mouse House’s point of view, it’s arguable whether there really is any problem at all. After all, Alice in Wonderland, Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin and The Lion King all took more than \$1bn at the global box office, while 2016’s The Jungle Book only just fell short of that milestone.

The pandemic (and poor notices for Tim Burton’s slightly pointless Dumbo) have led to subsequent remakes turning up on Disney+ instead, which makes it harder to judge their success with audiences. Mulan and Cruella both received fairly decent reviews (not so much Lady and the Tramp), yet all in all there’s an argument to be made that the studio could do with a major, transformative smash on a par with Jon Favreau’s spectacular The Jungle Book to get everyone excited again about its seemingly endless programme of remakes and origins stories.

Now comes Pinocchio, a first full-length trailer for which landed this week, and at first glance it seems to tick all the boxes. There will be no Sonic the Hedgehog-style online outrage here at a radical redesign: the puppet looks exactly as he did when we last saw him in 1940; ditto Jiminy Cricket, voiced by Joseph Gordon-Levitt. Tom Hanks’s background in the Toy Story movies makes him the obvious choice as Gepetto, while director Robert Zemeckis (Back to the Future, Who Framed Roger Rabbit, Forrest Gump) is an old hand unlikely to rock the boat.



▲ Jiminy Cricket (voiced by Joseph Gordon-Levitt) and Pinocchio (Benjamin Evan Ainsworth) in Disney’s live-action adaptation. Photograph: Courtesy of Disney Enterprises, Inc.

Once again the movie will turn up on Disney+ rather than in cinemas. And while straight-to-streaming release hardly makes for a black mark in the post-Covid era, it does mean the film will avoid the gauntlet of the Hollywood trade newspapers’ reports of box office opening weekends.

From the look of the trailer, the new version is playing it safer than a night out with the blue fairy (Cynthia Erivo in the remake). And why not? After all, this is Pinocchio, a staple of entertainment for the under-10s for more than 80 years; a moral parable designed to make parents’ lives easier by encouraging children never to listen to

outside influences unless they want to risk being transformed into a donkey or swallowed by a terrifying giant sea creature.

In terms of genuine threat, however, the 1940 film is a far cry from Carlo Collodi’s original 1883 novel The Adventures of Pinocchio, in which our hero is not a wide-eyed innocent but a mean-minded ingrate. He murders Jiminy Cricket (who returns as a ghost), is tortured, de-limbed and even hanged from a tree by his former friends the Fox and the Cat. The book’s message about the education of children – that they should learn from their own errors – is more complex than the Hollywood

adaptation.

And yet while that 1940 film suffers from twee moralism when viewed through a modern filter, it was considered at the time to be a masterpiece of technical innovation, with super smooth animation never before seen in Hollywood. It is hard to see how the remake will live up to the same standards unless it can pull off the kind of radical leaps delivered by Favreau’s Jungle Book, perhaps the first fully CGI (unless one counts Neel Sethi’s Mowgli) movie to appear genuinely photo-real throughout.

Could the Pinocchio remake be modernised by a return to the dark

places conjured by Collodi’s novel? Hanks’s involvement reminds us that the Toy Story films sometimes delved deep enough into horror that adults found themselves flinching. Who hasn’t woken in a cold sweat to a fever-dream replay of the garbage furnace scene in Toy Story 3? Anna and Elsa’s parents got killed off in Frozen. Poor Nemo’s mum and all his baby siblings got eaten by a barracuda!

But by the looks of it, the new Pinocchio seems to be following a similar path to the original Disney film rather than embracing its source material, with plenty of gentle tellings off and pithy offerings of avuncular wisdom from the supporting cast. Nor does there seem to have been much modernisation. A genuine attempt to update the story might have replaced the Fox and the Cat with a YouTuber who encourages Pinocchio to take part in dangerous challenges. Then again, perhaps not.

No doubt Pinocchio will make a worthwhile addition to Disney+’s catalogue, a cosy fantasy sojourn to lull the little ones into hyper-focus for 90 minutes or so. Whether it can repeat the achievements of its predecessor and find an enduring place in the grand pantheon of Hollywood animation remains to be seen. And whether it dares to push the moral boundaries of children’s entertainment, as many great animated films have done, might decide how we view this picture in years to come. The new blue whale certainly looks pretty scary, but we await Pinocchio’s Disney+ debut to discover if the film itself also has teeth.

‘It’s almost like a soap’: Saoirse Ronan and David Oyelowo on how the whodunnit rose from the dead

Xan Brooks

Hold on to your deerstalkers: the whodunnit is back, with its trail of clues, its lineup of suspects and its well-timed doses of British bloody murder. It arrives when the country is sickly, like a bustling matron, to reassure us that evil will out and that justice prevails in the end. The genre abides by its own strict set of rules. Its predictability has become its USP. “It’s a whodunnit,” says the world-weary narrator at the start of See How They Run. “You’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all.”

We have long since reached the point where every whodunnit is a whodunnit-this-time, another tour of the same old crime scene. Tom George’s spry, supple See How They Run is smart enough to acknowledge this, with a script that pokes fun at the grinding monotony of Agatha Christie’s The Mousetrap and a set of characters so schooled in the tropes of the genre that



▲ Killing it... (from left) Ruth Wilson, Reece Shearsmith, Harris Dickinson, Sian Clifford, Pearl Chanda, Jacob Fortune-Lloyd, David Oyelowo and Ania Marson in See How They Run. Photograph: Parisa Taghizadeh/Searchlight Pictures/20th Century Studios

they are practically running on rails.

But that introductory voiceover turns out to be a red herring. Every film format has to adapt to survive. Every period caper is a present-day creature at heart. “There’s a lovely in-built tension that comes with com-

bing a period thing with a modern point of view,” George says. “The film is set in 1953, but it only functions if you know the history of murder mysteries. The genre is almost the main character.”

See How They Run – a play within a film, a whodunnit within a who-

dunnit – is the director’s first feature. George came to it fresh from shooting three seasons of the deadpan mockumentary This Country for the BBC, trailing two jobless cousins around a Cotswolds village. His film imports two of the comedy’s stars (Charlie Cooper and Paul Chahidi). But it also preserves This Country’s air of realism, a loose improvisational quality that serves to oil the plot’s clockwork wheels.

Saoirse Ronan and Sam Rockwell play Stalker and Stoppard, the odd-couple investigators, rattling around a colourful postwar London, where the police cars are the size of ride-on lawnmowers and Singer sewing machines double as convenient murder weapons. The Mousetrap has just completed its 100th performance (barely the first lap of an infinite circle of hell) and there is a corpse in the wings and a backstage crime to be solved. But the real suspect here is the whodunnit itself. The film holds it to the light, probes for holes in its story. The killer’s eventual un-



▲ Christie-esque caper ... Daniel Craig and Ana de Armas in Knives Out. Photograph: Lionsgate/Allstar

masking is almost by the by. What made This Country exceptional was the way it undercut our expectations of a fly-on-the-wall documentary. See How They Run tries a similar tack with the hidebound murder mystery. “The rules of the genre provide an extra layer to work with,” George says. “The audience is aware of the conventions. And we’re aware that they’re aware. All of that can add texture and comedy. But it’s a potential

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trap as well, because you don't want to come across as too knowing, too arch." Most people, remember, watch murder mysteries because they love them. "So you don't want to be taking the piss."

George makes the genre sound like a part of the furniture or a venerable family member. It is something we laugh at and cherish and run to for comfort; something we have lived alongside for so long that we assume that it has always been around.

The first film whodunnit was probably 1928's *The Last Warning* (coincidentally, another backstage theatrical thriller), which was released a couple of years before the term was coined. Over the subsequent decades, the format has dipped in and out of favour: periodically overshadowed by its more psychologically knotty cousins, the howdunnit or the whydunnit; occasionally bumped by the great, godless justdunnit (which paints violence as random, motiveless, devoid of logic). But these films, books and plays have never gone away. "They're a mainstay," says George. "There can't have been a year – certainly in this country – when there hasn't been an Agatha Christie made."

Lately, though, we have been more partial than usual. Those in the market for museum-piece Christies are well served by Kenneth Branagh's big-screen overhauls of *Murder on the Orient Express* and *Death on the Nile*. Everyone else, check out Sarah Phelps' more jagged and interesting BBC adaptations. The author may be uncredited, but she is the presiding spirit behind Rian Johnson's *Knives Out*, a jubilant funhouse of a Hollywood thriller, complete with secret stairs and false backs. Christie's influence can also be felt on

the series *Only Murders in the Building*, about amateur sleuths on the tony Upper West Side of New York City. It is buried deep in the DNA of Halina Reijn's *Bodies Bodies Bodies*, a marriage of *And Then There Were None* and the twentysomething slasher flick. So, *See How They Run* is not alone; the film is part of an ensemble.

We like whodunnits the most, it seems, when times are tough. We like them because they provide moral clarity and a puzzle that can be solved. We like them because they are a distraction, a palliative, a respite from what the philosopher Charles West Churchman called the "wicked problem" that defies resolution. The so-called "golden age" of 1930s crime fiction coincided with an era of political extremism and economic upheaval. To complete the conditions behind this vintage, just add climate crisis and Covid to the mix.

After speaking with George, I contact the actor David Oyelowo, who plays the preening Mervyn Cocker-Norris, one of the film's chief suspects. Oyelowo says he was drawn to the production because it promised a break from the norm, a fun diversion, a nostalgic jaunt through London's theatre scene. The truth, he says, turned out to be more disturbing.

"This film came along in the red-hot eye of the pandemic, when it felt like the world had ended and that making movies and going to plays and simply being around people was no longer possible," he says. "And the film started shooting in the midst of all that – January 2021 – which became its own adventure. I remember doing the theatre scenes inside the Old Vic, which had been dark for months, and then stepping outside and seeing the streets completely barren. And I kid you not, I

found myself thinking: 'Is this over? Are we ever going to have that theatre experience again?'"

Mark Chappell's script for *See How They Run* hinges on a real-life clause in *The Mousetrap*'s contract that stipulates that a film version can't be made until the stage play has completed its initial run. The joke here, of course, is that *The Mousetrap* has never stopped running. It opened at the Ambassadors theatre in 1952, transferred to the St Martin's next door in 1974 and has been a West End fixture ever since, the greasepaint equivalent of the ravens in the Tower. At least, that was the joke when the script was drafted. The St Martin's theatre went dark for the first time between March 2020 and May 2021 – right through the making of a film about a play that never stops.

The cast and crew had planned to see *The Mousetrap* for research before filming began. In the event, that wasn't possible. Oyelowo reckons he dodged a bullet: "The idea of watching a play that is the longest-running production in history, with a rotating series of actors ... It literally gives me an anxiety attack"

Oyelowo admits that he is a creature of the theatre, "part of that whole luvvie culture". Even so, he knows his limits. "My first season at the RSC was 18 months long," he says. "I did three different shows in that time and I was ready to pull my toenails out. So, the claustrophobia of just sitting there and watching those actors and wondering how long they had been on that same stage saying those same lines – I think there was someone who had done it for decades – it would give me a flash of what my own career could have been."

Ronan has first-hand experience of long runs, too. The Irish actor was in a Broadway production of *The Crucible* that played for five months; heaped

helpings of anguish and darkness, night after night. By the end, she reckons, she was nearly fit to kill.

"The theatre world is very claustrophobic by nature," she says. "It's wonderful, but it can also be stressful. You're seeing the same people every single day for months and you're doing exactly the same show every single night. And, yes, there are surprises. But there's a monotony to it that sends you a bit mad. So, it's very natural for a murder to take place in a theatre."

All of which takes us back to the scene of the crime: London, 1953, just off St Martin's Lane. A Hollywood director has been bludgeoned to death in the wings. Stalker and Stoppard are rounding up all the suspects. But who is the killer? And, crucially, does it matter?

Over the course of the genre's history, every solution has been tried; there are no fresh angles left. The butler did it. The narrator did it. Everyone did it. No one did it. We require that the murder be explained, because those are the rules and an audience demands closure. But it is a box-ticking exercise, a contractual obligation. Any aficionado will tell you that the least interesting aspect of a whodunnit is who done it. The story is at its most exciting when all the pieces are in the air, when everyone is a suspect and we are invited to meet them, observe them and draw our own conclusions.

Certainly, this is how Ronan sees it. "To me, it's less about who done it and more about being introduced to all these colourful characters," she says. "That's the drama, I suppose, but it's almost like a soap. The script is basically me and Sam's character walking around and interviewing people, like you're doing right now. The actors get a few minutes to shine. And we sit in

the corner playing the observer, making notes, like eejits. That's how these films work, so why mess with the formula?"

Off camera, in the wings, the production followed a similar script. The cast and crew had been cooped up for months. Now, here they were, suddenly part of an ensemble again. They got to hang out, joke around, work out which colleagues they liked and which they did not. After the isolation of lockdown, that in itself felt healthy. Films don't just offer an escape for the audience. They can provide a respite for the film-makers as well.

Basically, says Ronan, she had a great time. The pandemic was raging, the streets were deserted and they were shooting a film that contained at least two cold-blooded murders. Yet, for the first time in ages, the world made sense – and felt hopeful. "It's weird, because this film has a really dark underbelly," she says. "It's about alcoholism and tragedy and the losses of postwar Britain. But people go to see a movie like this because they know what they're going to get. In the end, I think, there's a comfort in that."

● *See How They Run* is in UK cinemas from 9 September, and Australian cinemas from 29 September

There's a monotony to the stage that sends you a bit mad. So, it's very natural for a murder to take place in a theatre

Saoirse Ronan

‘Britney was broken. I’ve been broken and it’s horrible’: Elton John on helping Britney Spears sing again

Laura Snapes

This July, in a small basement studio in Beverly Hills surrounded by candles, coloured lights, keyboards and her new husband, Britney Spears rebooted her music career. Six years since her last album, and nine months since she was freed from the conservatorship that had ruled her life for 13 years, she was at the home studio of producer Andrew Watt, recording her parts for *Hold Me Closer* – a duet with Elton John which mashes up perhaps his defining hit, 1971's *Tiny Dancer*, with his 1992 song *The One* (and a dash of 1976's *Don't Go Breaking My Heart*).

Spears arrived with her vocals warmed up and determined ideas about her contribution, and nailed the performance in less than two hours. "She sang fantastically," says John from his house in the south of France. "Everyone was saying they don't think she can sing any more. But I said, she was brilliant when she started so I think she can. And she did it, and I was so thrilled with what she did."

Released today, the euphoric *Hold*



▲ Britney Spears and Elton John in 2013 at the Elton John Aids Foundation's Oscars viewing party. Photograph: Michael Kovac/Getty Images for EJAF

Me Closer follows *Cold Heart*, John's 2021 duet with Dua Lipa, which combined his hits *Rocket Man*, *Sacrifice*,

Kiss the Bride and *Where's the Shoo-rah?* and made him the first solo artist to score a UK Top 10 single in six

different decades. "I want to do one every year for a fun, happy summer record," says John. After he and Watt created the new *Tiny Dancer* remix, they weren't sure who to invite in as guest vocalist. Then John's husband, David Furnish, had an idea. "He said it would be wonderful for Britney Spears to do it," John says, as the pair sit side by side the day after he surprised diners in a Cannes restaurant with an impromptu performance of the song. "I said, that's a pretty amazing idea. She hadn't done anything for so long. I'd been following what's been happening to her for a long time."

John had been an admirer since day one. "She just put out incredibly brilliant records," he says. "She sang and danced so beautifully." They first met at his Aids foundation Oscars viewing party in 2013, and she was "lovely – adorable". And they had their respective Las Vegas residencies at the same time, her at Planet Hollywood, him at Caesars Palace. But even though they often stayed in the same apartment block, "we didn't really see each other", says John.

Given what we now know, it's hard



▲ Elton John during his Farewell Yellow Brick Road tour in New Orleans in January. Photograph: Derick Hingle/AP

to imagine many people saw Spears at that time. In her fearsome testimony to a court hearing on her conservatorship in June 2021, Spears said she was punished and put on lithium for rejecting some new choreography during the residency, and likened herself to a slave, earning millions for the controllers of the arrangement, including her father, Jamie Spears, while being allocated a \$2,000 weekly allowance herself.

In January 2019, she cancelled the residency and announced an "indefinite work hiatus". Soon after, the #FreeBritney movement went mainstream, convinced – accurately, it would

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transpire – that Spears was being exploited and abused. In September 2021, the New York Times released the documentary Framing Britney Spears, detailing her fight with her father. John watched it. “You forget she was the biggest star in the whole world at that time. And to see what happened to her makes me so angry. What happened to her shouldn’t have happened to anybody.”

Spears was freed from her conservatorship by a judge in November 2021. The following month, she said that her experiences had left her scared of the music industry, with no intention of picking up her career. “Not doing my music any more is a way of saying ‘fuck you’,” she wrote on Instagram. But she didn’t need any convincing to join John for the duet, he says.

Spears was going to fly to London to record with John, but she was in the middle of her honeymoon after her wedding to the Iranian American model and actor Sam Asghari – having been restricted from marrying or managing her own birth control under the conservatorship – and so recorded with Watt at his studio in Los Angeles. He had never met her before. When she arrived, they talked about music they loved. “She asked me who my favourite artists were – Prince – and I asked her who hers was. She said Elton John,” says Watt. “The song meant so much to her, and you can hear it in her vocal performance. She’s singing her ass off.”

It was as if no time had passed since Spears last stepped inside a studio, Watt adds. “She was so prepared. She had spent time with the record and knew how she wanted to do it.” To

construct the song, he explains meticulously, he took the guitar from Tiny Dancer, originally buried so low in the mix you could hardly hear it, and fiddled with the tempo. Extracting the original bass and strings and speeding them up gave it a disco feel. To amplify that sense of transcendence, he punctuated the song with a scale-climbing, heaven-bound sample of “hold me closer”. And John played new Rhodes piano (those are his original vocals).

Watt is 31, the prime age to have been a huge childhood Spears fan with her posters on his wall. He was now faced with one of the biggest pop stars of all time recording her instantly identifiable, strobing, rasping vocals in the same room. “She’s unbelievable at layering her voice and doubling, which is one of the hardest things to do. She really pushed herself, vocally. Sometimes when you produce, the greatest thing in the world you can do is say nothing, so I just let her do her thing. She’s so good at knowing when she got the right take. She took complete control.”

Spears recorded the falsetto parts first, then the lines where she belts. Watt never had to ask her to do anything, and watched as she exacted her own high standards. “She kept going: ‘Nope, again, again, again.’” Then she had an “amazing idea”, he says. “She wanted to listen to the music a bunch of times and she started doing all her incredible ad libs that make the record so *her*. Tiny Dancer with her voice is special enough, but then she went through and did all these amazing runs.”

Once they had recorded, Spears was “incredibly specific” about how she wanted her vocals and levels mixed,

he says. “She was really collaborative and had really good ideas about the production. She’s an expert in music to make you dance.” (Spears’s primary form of performance in recent years has been posting self-choreographed dance videos to Instagram.) “So many of her records are pop perfection, she worked with the greatest of all time and made timeless pop. We experimented with speeding the record up and turning certain elements of the sound up to get it pumping and make you wanna dance.”

Given how disempowered Spears has said she was in the process of making her own music during the conservatorship, she must have felt liberated to wield her expertise in the studio, I suggest. “We didn’t really get into that,” says Watt. “She came there to sing and record. She’s so pro. And if that was something that she was thinking about, she put it all into the record.”

It was afterwards, John admits, that Spears needed some convincing that releasing the track was the right thing to do. (On 25 August, she tweeted about being “kinda overwhelmed ... it’s a big deal to me !!!”) “We had to get her to approve what she did,” he says. “She’s been away so long – there’s a lot of fear there because she’s been betrayed so many times and she hasn’t really been in the public eye officially for so long. We’ve been holding her hand through the whole process, reassuring her that everything’s gonna be alright.

“I’m so excited to be able to do it with her because if it is a big hit, and I think it may be, it will give her so much more confidence than she’s got already and she will realise that people actually love her and care for her and want her to be happy. That’s all anybody in their right mind would want after she went

through such a traumatic time.”

John is no stranger to helping musicians experiencing difficulties whether in their personal or professional lives, from George Michael, Robbie Williams and Geri Horner (Halliwell) in the 90s to contemporary artists such as Lewis Capaldi, the xx’s Oliver Sim and Sam Fender. He’s motivated by his memories of his own struggles, he says. “It’s hard when you’re young. Britney was broken. I was broken when I got sober. I was in a terrible place. I’ve been through that broken feeling and it’s horrible. And luckily enough, I’ve been sober for 32 years and it’s the happiest I’ve ever been. Now I’ve got the experience to be able to advise people and help them because I don’t want to see any artists in a dark place. A lot of artists, you’d think they’d have a lot of self-esteem but they don’t, and that’s why we go onstage and we get the applause, and then we come offstage and we’re back to square one.”

He wants musicians to “enjoy what they’re doing and feel that they’re worthwhile”, he says. “They deserve to be happy and to be loved and to have an affirmation from someone like me. When I first went to America, I had affirmations from Leon Russell, George Harrison, the Band, Neil Diamond – it made me so happy. It makes you realise they cared and it gave me validation that what I was doing was OK.”

Peer support is one thing: should the industry be better regulated to support musicians and prevent exploitation? “It’s down to having a good manager for a start,” says John. “Someone who’s with you 24/7, who believes in you. It’s all about reaching out. I never reached out and asked for help because I thought, I’m too proud – it will make

me feel weak. A lot of these artists don’t reach out for help, so I find out and ring up and then we get together.

“I don’t really know about the music industry. Everyone’s got a different case. It’s very hard for young musicians today to jumpstart a career. Sam Fender has done it with his second record. Little Simz has been fantastic, but she couldn’t go to America because she didn’t have the money to do her tour, which is a disaster for her because the record is doing quite well in America. So there’s a lot of pressure. It is what it is. But I’m Uncle Elton. They can phone me.”

As for Spears, she tweeted before the release that she’s learning “every day is a clean slate to try and be a better person and do what makes me happy ... I want to be fearless like when I was younger.”

“Rehabilitation is such a wonderful thing for anybody,” says John. “And I’m just crossing my fingers that this will restore her confidence in herself to get back into the studio, make more records, and realise that she is bloody good.”

● Hold Me Closer is out now.

It's very hard for young musicians today to jumpstart a career. But I'm Uncle Elton. They can phone me

Harry Styles Mercury prize win would be cherry on cake of a charmed year

Shaad D'Souza

When the winner of this year’s Mercury prize is announced in London next month, Harry Styles will be nowhere to be found. Rather than rub shoulders with fellow nominees, including the Oscar-nominated actor Jessie Buckley and acclaimed geordie singer-songwriter Sam Fender, the former One Direction member will be in New York, performing at Madison Square Garden as part of a critically acclaimed 15-show residency.

Most artists dream of the boost in popularity that comes with a Mercury win – not to mention the accompanying £25,000 cheque. But Styles, whose nominated album has sold about 100,000 more copies than its closest rival, Fender, is playing a different game.

Released in May, Harry’s House is already the biggest album of the year. It debuted at No 1 in the UK – one of only three 2022 Mercury nominees to reach the summit – and stayed there for six weeks, beating Adele’s 30 and Olivia Rodrigo’s Sour to become the longest-running chart leader of the decade so far. In the US, Harry’s House notched 521,500 album-equivalent units in its first week, the largest sales week of any album this year, and produced four Top 10 singles, including the No 1, As It Was.



▲ Harry Styles performs on stage during Radio 1’s Big Weekend 2022, Coventry, in May. Photograph: Dave J Hogan/Getty Images

As well as being a commercial hit, Harry’s House has received glowing reviews from a broad spectrum of the music press. It’s hard to think of a recent Mercury nominee to have enjoyed this mix of critical acclaim, sales and popularity both sides of the Atlantic.

Styles’ transformation from boy-band heart-throb to critically acclaimed rocker did not happen overnight. In the seven years since One Direction disbanded, the 28-year-old has worked hard to cement himself as a kind of spiritual heir to the classic rock throne, eschewing modern pop trappings in favour of Jagger-indebted showmanship and a sound that, in

turn, references Led Zeppelin, Laurel Canyon folk and Britpop. Styles is an unashamed throwback artist, down to the way his image is exalted and picked over in the media: for his first Rolling Stone cover story, he was profiled by the famed rock critic Cameron Crowe, writer and director of Almost Famous, while a breathless review of his first album in NPR described him as “rock’s saviour”.

“We have a cultural shorthand for pop artists being taken seriously, and it’s playing a guitar, not singing to a backing track,” says Brodie Lancaster, a cultural critic who has written extensively on One Direction, and who gave a keynote speech on boybands at the

2016 EMP Pop Conference. Styles’ self-titled, 2017 solo debut started what Lancaster calls “a very considered and deliberate campaign to have him seem like an indie artist who was on the up with his own music.”

Since his days as an X Factor contestant back in 2010, Styles’ success has been bolstered by an army of obsessive fans, most of them young women, who track his movements, promote his songs and keep his name atop Twitter’s trending topics chart. His relationship with his fans is one built on mutual respect. In interviews, he defends them from misogynistic tropes about fangirls, and Boyfriends, a song from Harry’s House, speaks directly to them: “Boyfriends / They take you for granted / They don’t know they’re just misunderstanding you.”

“The engagement he has with his fans is largely at concerts – fans will communicate with him via posters that say [things like] I want to come out to my parents,” says Lancaster. “He’s been known to give them the moment to announce that to the arena.”

In recent years, Styles has also become known for his eye-popping, gender-bending outfits, which have included bright feather boas, patterned suits and, on the cover of Vogue, a Gucci dress. Rachel Seville Tashjian, fashion news director at Harper’s Bazaar US, says Styles, along with his stylist Harry



▲ Harry Styles performs on the Coachella stage in April 2022. Photograph: Kevin Mazur/Getty Images for Coachella

Lambert, has helped usher in an era of “very colourful, almost provocative” fashion.

“[Styles] is willing to wear designers that aren’t necessarily household names,” she says, citing the American brand Bode as a label whose profile Styles helped boost. “He’s very enthusiastic about wearing not only designers that we haven’t heard of, but silhouettes or shapes from them that are kind of unorthodox for someone who is a young, white male.”

Styles’ flamboyant fashion sense, as well as his ongoing refusal to label his sexual orientation publicly, has led some on the internet to accuse him of “queerbaiting” – the act of co-opting supposedly queer aesthetics in order to win fans and clout. Tashjian suggests that these accusations are missing the point. “I can’t overstate – espe-

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cially having worked at GQ - how significant it just is to see men wearing skirts, and to see that as something joyful and pleasurable and even casual," she says. "He's someone who seems to understand the potential impact of the silhouettes that he's wearing."

More recently, criticisms of Styles'

relationship with the LGBTQ+ community has gone beyond fashion. Earlier this week, comments he made about his role in the forthcoming adaptation of Bethan Roberts' *My Policeman*, a period piece about two men falling in love when homosexuality was still a criminal offence, sparked outrage and ridicule. Styles said the film was "not like 'This is a gay story about

these guys being gay,'" and said it would feature more "tenderness" in its sex scenes than the average gay drama. "It's disappointing ... to read Styles downplaying the film's queerness in a way that smacks of a past era's panic," wrote Guy Lodge in the Guardian this week.

Still, it's a mild controversy compared with those experienced by many pop stars of Styles' ilk. The past year of

Styles' career has, by all measures, been a raging success; the next 12 months are likely to be, too. Days before the Mercury is announced, *Don't Worry Darling*, a psychological thriller in which Styles stars opposite Florence Pugh, directed by his girlfriend, Olivia Wilde, will premiere at the Venice film festival, and *My Policeman* arrives a month later. Meanwhile, Styles will take up

further residencies at stadiums across America, including a 15-night run at the Forum in Los Angeles. A Mercury win for Harry's House wouldn't be life-changing for Styles by any means - but it would be the cherry on top of a charmed year.

Tame Impala review – a rowdy, romping multisensory extravaganza

Dorian Lynskey

What an unusual proposition Tame Impala are. Kevin Parker, a genial Australian with a laissez-faire look that might be described as surfer rave Jesus, started out in the late 2000s as a one-man psychedelic rock band who pretended he didn't play every note himself because he worried he wasn't interesting enough to be a solo artist. Now he's the platinum-selling producer called on to make a song with Diana Ross for the soundtrack to *Despicable Me 3* and remix Elvis for Baz Luhrmann. His five-man live show, meanwhile, has become enough of a draw to headline Coachella in 2019 when Justin Timberlake dropped out, where they staged such an expensively brain-melting production that Parker actually lost money.

That show was intended to promote his fourth album, *The Slow Rush*, but it wasn't ready yet (perfectionism is a beast). As soon as it finally came out, in



▲ *Like a surfer rave Jesus ... Kevin Parker of Tame Impala performing at All Points East. Photograph: Jim Dyson/Getty Images*

February 2020, the pandemic put Tame Impala on ice. It was all too ironic for a record about how time always seems to pass too quickly or too slowly. This return to London, then, has been a long time coming. "I can't tell you how fucking long I've waited for this," he says with feeling. "I thought this day would never come."

A Tame Impala show aspires to be a multisensory happening, somewhere between Pink Floyd and the Chemical Brothers. It's more than a rock gig, yet not quite a rave. A playful introductory video features a pharmaceutical rep advertising a new drug which alters your perception of time. "Now would be a great time to take your Rushium,"

she advises. The band-blurring visuals recall both 60s psychedelia and early 90s club culture. During the heady instrumental *Gossip* - ambient waves ruptured by a gnarly, busted-speaker buzz - a UFO-like rig descends, emitting a rainbow glow. It's all very Rushium-friendly.

At first Tame Impala coast a little on vibes and spectacle but the energy spikes with the glam-rock ruckus of *Elephant*, as lasers fan out across the field like a peacock's tail, and explodes during the Daft Punk-y colossus *Let It Happen*. "There's a drop coming," Parker says, endearingly carried away by his own song. "Are you ready?" Screams and confetti ensue. He could probably afford to lean harder into that quadrant of Tame Impala's sound. While *Breathe Deeper* climaxes with an acidic blast from the Roland 303, the piano-house romp *Patience* and siren-blaring *It Might Be Time* are mystifyingly absent from a set that could use a bit more dancefloor muscle. The festival's second-stage headliners Caribou,



▲ *'Now would be a great time to take your Rushium' ... Tame Impala. Photograph: Jim Dyson/Getty Images*

another band built around a soft-voiced bedroom producer, provide more moments of transcendent intensity.

What Tame Impala are doing is certainly working, though. Fans sing along to synthesiser riffs as lustily as if they were terrace chants. The *Less I Know the Better*, one of the dreamiest songs ever to exceed a billion streams, is greeted like an anthem. Parker's meticulously produced headphone records scale up into something improbably spectacular when played loud in a field dazzled with lights.

Ezra Furman: 'I was like, this record has to be a weapon of war'

Emma Garland

"The future is a text message sending," Ezra Furman declares on *Forever in Sunset*, the synth-scorched first single from her new album, *All of Us Flames*. On the face of it, the lyrics tell a classic American tale: two people in a car - one of them "trouble" - pulling on to a highway with a full tank and the sun in their eyes. The backing is a groundswell of power chords and crashing percussion, recalling Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run*, with its depiction of underclass dreams bursting out of the confines of material reality. But Furman completely turns her back on society. As the collapse of civilisation feels increasingly inevitable, she heads for a new frontier where rugged individualism and systemic failure are vanquished by interdependence and resilience. The passengers ditch the unavoidable for the unknown, with nothing but friendship on their side, Thelma and Louise, suspended in midair.

"I was trying to [say], there is no end of the world," Furman explains, sipping a small beer in a quiet garden in east London. It is a few days after the UK's first bout of extreme heat, when record-breaking temperatures left parts



▲ *'To hold a baby and feed him changed my brain. It changed what human life looks like to me' ... Ezra Furman. Photograph: Tonje Thilesen*

of Essex on fire and bin bags melted on the pavement, and a sense of doom hangs in the air. "Your rights being taken away by the government is not the apocalypse. Not being able to buy food at the supermarket any more is not the apocalypse. Or maybe it is - but then we've got to figure out how to grow food ourselves and bring it to our neighbours. We've got to keep taking care of each other."

Furman, 35, fiddles with the zips on a beaten-up leather jacket. With her cropped brown hair and electric-blue eyeshadow, she cuts a cool figure,

resembling the subject of one of the new album's most vulnerable songs, *Ally Sheedy in the Breakfast Club* - a playful, lo-fi love letter to "the teenage girl I never got to be". "Queer people are just not given a model for how to be that works, so we find it in the trash of pop culture," Furman says. She pauses, smiles, then adds, "And I believe in finding treasure in the trash."

Just as the cult John Hughes character's outsider ego and uncompromising self-belief were a beacon for the young Furman, now her songs play that role for others. Her stories

of fragility and confusion have provided the soundtrack to Netflix's beloved *Sex Education*, which unglues stories of queer sex and romance from the usual territory of suffering. Meanwhile, Furman's solo albums have grown sharper teeth. On 2018's *Transangelic Exodus*, she and an angel lover run away from an oppressive government in a cinematic road trip, while 2019's *Twelve Nudes* lashes out at the sad state of the world in brash bursts of punk. While Furman is soft-spoken and thoughtful in person, taking long pauses after each question to gather her thoughts before offering a winding response, as a songwriter she breathes fire.

Produced by John Congleton (St Vincent, Angel Olsen) in Los Angeles, *All of Us Flames* is an album of dreamy, unshackled indie rock, while the lyrics wield ideas of community and solidarity like loaded guns. Most of the songs speak to the fight for survival, specifically with reference to the Jewish community and "the 20 people I know in the world who would walk across burning coals for me, as I would for them", she says.

The album conveys a feeling of endurance typical of canonical rock'n'roll that speaks to Furman's



▲ *Furman playing in Austin, Texas, earlier this year. Photograph: Tim Mosenfelder/Getty Images*

desire to get closer to crafting the kinds of songs that outlive their maker. During the writing process she listened to a lot of Bob Dylan, Lucinda Williams, the Shangri-Las (whose *Dressed in Black* inspired a song of the same name about two lovers fleeing a hostile world). "I kept thinking about this world-weary protest music, but also this feminine vitality of teenage girls," she says. "I wanted these things to coexist." On the woozy *Lilac and Black*, Furman and her "queer girl gang" drive out their oppressors and claim a hostile city for themselves. The anthemic *Book of Our Names* was inspired by the second book of the Hebrew Bible and etches into history those who are cast to the margins of life. "I want there to



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be / A book of our names / None of them missing / None quite the same / None of us ashes / All of us flames."

Since the release of *Twelve Nudes*, Furman's public-facing life has changed somewhat. Last April, Furman came out as transgender and said she had been a mother for two years. It is something she resisted talking about for a while, wanting to shield her child from "the shitty world of strangers reacting to us". However, there were also feelings of obligation at play. "I've been thinking a lot about suicide culture among trans people, and increasingly understanding that it's because we haven't seen versions of futures or kinds of lives we can have," Furman says. "I became a parent without ever having even seen a picture of a transfeminine parent, you know? That clipped my wings and held me back from imagining what my life could be."

Her original Instagram post was intended for friends, family and fans, but

ended up becoming clickbait. It was reported by CNN, People magazine, Fox News - mass media outlets whose reach directed a waterfall of transphobia towards Furman. She was working on the album in California at the time. "I have a problem with addictively reading that stuff, but I was like, if you *fucking* losers understood how cool my life was right now, you'd be so embarrassed of yourselves," she seethes.

Much of the album was written during the early months of the pandemic, a time that Furman describes as "ridiculously happy" for her family. Yet home was also "not a nice place to be". They had just moved from Berkeley in California to Somerville in Massachusetts, and started renting a property from a landlord they hadn't met. When they were finally introduced, the landlord made it clear that he had a problem with their family setup. "Because he lived upstairs, his presence was inescapable," Furman says. She would drive to a lake or a forest - "somewhere I couldn't really see civilisation" - to write

away from her claustrophobic living situation. "I could feel that I was writing a document of a particularly threatened moment in my life," she says. "It all felt very charged with threat."

But *All of Us Flames* is fuelled just as much by love as by anger. Each song considers a vision of the future connected to concepts of care and community as they relate to parenthood and transness specifically. "The thing I really love about becoming a parent is that - to use the phrase from the album - it makes you organise your life around love and care in a concrete way," Furman says softly. "Daily life is like: 'I'm not doing that because I have to do this.' Just to hold a baby and feed him - I think it really just changed my brain. It changed what human life looks like to me."

That care comes through in *All of Us Flames*, which is assembled like a circle of people linking arms: it's sonically robust, with a distinct lack of space, creating the sensation that the songs are built to catch you if you

fall. Furman says it's her most collaborative album in a long time. She co-wrote some songs with drummer Sam Durkes, and learned to turn the instrumentation over to Congleton and the band more often. "In the past, I've really been like, it has to be like *this*," she says, popping her eyes and straining her voice as if strangling someone. "And I actually think that didn't serve me well. It mirrors a theme of the record, too: that we all do better if we depend on each other."

She has also noted a natural tendency to write in the first person plural; her perspective shifting from "I" to "us". Behind the album, there is a message of hope - something that has been absent from much of Furman's previous work. It speaks to a creeping exhaustion with our crumbling empire and a refusal to wait for it to change. Rather than doomscrolling, it is better to look for ways to rearrange life around networks of support. In some small ways, that's already happening, says Furman.

"When we had this transphobic

landlord, word spread throughout the queers that we were in this hard spot, and they were like: 'We will go to the fucking mat for you, let me at this motherfucker!' That really got into my worldview. I was like, oh, I *need* queer community."

In return, Furman raised her own fists. "I was like, this record has to be a weapon of war," she says definitively, as the first spots of rain in weeks start to fall. "This is armour for my people."

All of Us Flames is out today on *Bella Union*.

I was writing a document of a particularly threatened moment in my life

'I fell asleep on a soundsystem!' - the pyramid-building artists invading Notting Hill carnival

Oliver Basciano

Alvaro Barrington is recalling his first ever festival experience in Grenada: "I was maybe five years old and my cousins took me to J'ouvert," he says, referring to the day that acts as a precursor to the main party in Caribbean culture. "I have a memory of one of my older cousins holding my hand as we walked through the streets. We found a sound system and I climbed up on it and immediately fell asleep with the music blasting. A few hours later, I woke up to my cousin carrying me home while I laid on his shoulder."

He may have missed out on the good stuff, but the sleepy experience has inspired his latest project. Because amid the floats, sound systems and food trucks at this year's Notting Hill carnival there will also be a pavilion designed specifically for people who need to take a bit of time out from the action. Located next to where the carnival's judges are based on the Great Western Road, the approximately three-metre high structure is made from a series of interlocking plywood components. The pavilion will be completed during the carnival's opening parade by members of the community who will carry elements of the building, slotting them into the roughly pyramid-shaped construction themselves at the end of the procession. Once finished, party-goers will be able to rest inside Barrington's pavilion, or clamber up the outside in order to better see the procession. "Carnival can be a place for many different types of culture," he says. "For the Caribbean community, it has a long history of being a space



▲ 'Diasporic in its logic' ... the pavilion takes shape for the raucous party that is Carnival. Composite: Copyright 2022 Glasshopper / NWE. © Sumayya Vally and Alvaro Barrington.



in which art gets produced. I thought maybe we can bring architecture into that too."

Born in Venezuela to a Haitian father, but having spent his early childhood with his maternal grandmother in Grenada, Barrington gravitated towards the annual west London party after arriving in the UK to study art seven years ago. He initiated the project, but it is also a collaboration with the architect Sumayya Vally, who became involved in the British carnival scene after she was picked to create the annual Serpentine pavilion last year. Her Hyde Park structure was a homage to various community spaces across London, not least the Mangrove, a historic Caribbean restaurant. It too spread beyond its initial home, with "fragments" of the building installed across the city, including in the Tabernacle, the Notting Hill music and community space.

"This new structure can likewise be taken apart and put back together, it is diasporic in its logic," says Vally, whose

grandparents were Indian migrants to South Africa. "We started to think about spaces of gathering in west London and across the Caribbean. There are characteristics we could reference, like steps and porches." Barrington, who before he came to Britain spent his teenage years in Brooklyn, agrees that the stoop - the long external steps leading to the communal front doors of New York's tenements and brownstones, places to socialise or watch the neighbourhood - are symbolic of African American community. The pavilion is, he says, a "place where the carnival judges can view the costumes being paraded, places where carnival elders can sit".

Vally was the youngest designer in the history of the Serpentine pavilion and Barrington is no less precocious. His first show on graduating from art school was at New York's MoMA PS1 and he is represented by six galleries internationally, curators and critics impressed by his expanded vision for painting. His canvases, the mainstay of

his practice, are invariably interrupted by textiles, woven threads and objects, often referencing his own biography. They come together as a form of bricolage storytelling, often with migration as the central narrative.

"In the very short history of humans on this planet, migration is a consistent truth. It became a material interest in my art because though it's personal it is also a universal human condition," he explains. A recent work, *Lady sing small @proud Mary bottom up*, features different coloured threads sewn in blocks to a blue painted canvas. A drum and a broom are attached hanging down below the frame. Those elements are glorious intrusions to a composition that otherwise evokes the canonical history of geometric abstraction. At his recent solo exhibition at the South London Gallery, Barrington divided the space into North and South. In the former he hung a series of works reminiscent of cloud studies, made using wet concrete smeared onto dyed Hermès blankets. In the latter, as a commentary on global political and economic power structures, the same technique was used on hessian, the material most frequently associated with food bags and trade.

In 2019, the last carnival before its pandemic hiatus, Barrington organised a float of his paintings to join the parade. "Just to hire a truck can cost anything between £10,000 and £30,000. Now there's inflation, there's the cost of fuel. It's getting harder. So what you find is that a lot of the creativity has had to be reeled in and instead you'll see advertising for liquor or whatever. So I wanted to use a truck that would have been advertising a brand or whatever



▲ 'A place for many different types of culture' ... Performers in costume at the main Parade day of the 2019 carnival. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

but instead show paintings."

Is there a danger that gallery artists entering the foray could add to this gentrification? "The idea of artists as gentrifiers is a distraction from who actually has power in those processes," he says. "Gentrification happens through legislation, through the social conditioning that property is an asset. Saying that artists are gentrifiers is often done in bad faith so as not to address the issue." Vally agrees: "Notting Hill's power comes from its hybridity, the way it brings so many people into the conversation," she says.

Working with the carnival organisers was a natural fit. "I think there were a lot of assumptions made by very smart people in the 20th century about ideas of purity and reduction," says Barrington, "and I think most people didn't live their lives that way. I think what you see in my practice and Sumayya's practice is that these definitions were never truly real. Some people fell into an assembly line idea of art making, where they would only make paintings. But most people don't live their creativity that way."

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The Guardian

Kenny Beats: Louie review – brave, hooky, son-to-father reflections

Alexis Petridis

In his own telling, the debut album by Kenneth Charles Blume III shouldn't exist. He's best known as Kenny Beats, a hip-hop producer whose CV ranges from Vince Staples to Jpegmafia to Slowthai, and is something of an internet celebrity, too. He's racked up millions of views for his YouTube series the Cave, on which Blume makes a beat on the hoof and guest artists, including Doja Cat, Lil Yachty and Freddie Gibbs, freestyle over it; Billie Eilish and Skrillex have appeared as judges on his Twitch channel "beat battles", where unknown producers fight it out to win equipment.

Despite his productivity, Kenny Beats has said he had no ambition to make a solo album on the grounds that he "didn't have anything to say", a noble sentiment that's never stopped many musicians. His mind was apparently changed when he found himself unexpectedly quarantined in Bath – he was working on Idles' fourth album, Crawler – and received the news that his father had been diagnosed with cancer.

It sent Blume back to the compilation tapes that his father made in the 90s. A former basketball player and would-be broadcaster who struggled with drug addiction, Blume senior would introduce his selections in the style of a radio DJ. They audibly inform the music on Louie, which comes complete with spoken-word interludes,



▲ 'Wistful and reflective' ... Kenny Beats. Photograph: Evan Tetreault

usually featuring lo-fi recordings of his dad's voice, occasionally in conversation with Blume's younger self. It rattles through 17 tracks in just over 30 minutes, leaping suddenly from one to the next like an over-eager mixtape compiler who can't wait for a song to finish before hitting you with the next. The fact that it was apparently intended just as something to give his father might dictate its overall mood, which is wistful and reflective rather than downcast.

Its main sample source is obscure 70s soul, the kind of stuff that ends up being excavated decades later by labels such as Numero Group and Light in the Attic. There's a particular slant towards the various adolescent African American vocalists who emerged in the wake of the Jackson 5's success: the Triads' Now I Can Hold My Head Up High, Shira Small's Eternal Life – a track

recorded as part of a school project – and Foster Sylvers's fabulously exuberant Misdemeanor, a minor US hit in 1973, but doomed to obscurity by its author's subsequent conviction for a child sexual abuse offence.

The vintage of the tracks Louie draws on often makes its contents sound a little like early 90s G-funk, albeit a ramshackle take on the Dr Dre-pioneered genre. That's partly because most of the source material sounded a little ramshackle in the first place, recorded fast and cheap for tiny labels or private pressings (the Triads' single was put out by a short-lived Florida enterprise called, unbelievably, Gimp Records), and partly because Blume arranges them in a deliberately haphazard way, creating patchworks of sound with the stitching and the seams evident.

Sometimes you sense he's driving at a subtly emotional effect. Paranthesis features lush strings and horns, lazy flecks of wah-wah guitar and a laid-back electric piano solo, but the beat behind them seems a tiny fraction out, as if it's stumbling slightly and holding on to the music for balance. Every vintage sound on That Third Thing feels out of focus, a memory of which you can conjure the outline, but can't fully access. On Hold My Head, the vocals are optimistic and radiant – "I'm on top of the world ... I'm in ecstasy it seems" – but Blume manipulates them so they occasionally slip very slightly out of tune, as if he's touching the edge of a turntable as a single plays. The effect is jarring, like hearing a voice proclaiming that everything's fine, as it wobbles with emotion.

The standard approach for a hip-hop producer helming a solo album is to pack it with starry features. Here, there are brief, obvious guest appearances from Jpegmafia and Slowthai, the latter in particular on raging, foul-mouthed form (few things puncture a mood of wistful reflection quite like a bloke from Northampton snapping: "Fuck your mum, fuck your sister, fuck your fucking sperm donor of a dad") but their contributions are largely looped and distorted, part of the overall wash of sound rather than spotlight star turns. Given the circumstances of the album's genesis, nothing either of them has to say feels as striking as the repeated phrases Blume picks out from old



▲ Kenny Beats: Louie album cover

records: "We live for ever"; "I say goodbye just to miss you"; "I'll be there, I really love you".

But you don't need to know the backstory to enjoy Louie. (And happily, Blume's father is still with us.) Strange but hooky, sonically unified but constantly changing, possessed of an odd emotional pull, the music here would grip you regardless. There's a certain bravery involved in releasing something so personal to the general public: listening to Louie makes you glad Blume chose to.

This week Alexis listened to

Sha Sha – Themba Lami ft Ami Faku From the Zimbabwean singer-songwriter's new album I'm Alive, a heavy-lidded slowly floating ballad that's an unwittingly perfect end-of-the-summer soundtrack.

'I'm shocked': Britain's 'coastal grandmothers' on becoming TikTok style icons

Chloe Mac Donnell; photographs by Alicia Canter/the Guardian

In March, the 26-year-old influencer Lex Nicoleta posted a video on TikTok in which she coined the term "coastal grandmother". The look, an aspirational way of dressing, Nicoleta explained, was inspired by the white linen-clad stars of Nancy Meyers rom-coms, including Diane Keaton in Something's Gotta Give. More than just fashion, coastal grandmother embodies an entire lifestyle. Think affluent retired women in button-down shirts, shopping at organic farmer markets or throwing cosy, candlelit dinner parties for fellow divorcees in a beach-front mansion. Crucially, you neither have to live by the coast nor be a grandmother to enjoy the trend.

The TikTok hashtag #CoastalGrandmother has been viewed more than 207m times and featured everywhere from ITV's This Morning to Vogue. Celebrities are on board, with the look championed by Gwyneth Paltrow and Kendall Jenner. In creamy chinos, oversized sunglasses and an



▲ Lesley McBride, 67, from Hove: 'I haven't heard of it but it's just like me'

equally large sun hat, Anne Hathaway lauded the trend on Instagram. "I have been ready for #coastalgrandmother chic since before TikTok was born," she wrote. "May this moment never end."

Aside from Oprah relaxing in slouchy knitwear, the celebrities and fictional characters most often referenced as coastal grandmother icons are wealthy and white, leading some to criticise the trend as exclusive.

Despite this, the popularity of the coastal grandmother continues to grow.

We've seen what makes for a perfect coastal grandmother both on the big screen (see Meryl Streep in It's Complicated) and off-screen via celebrity summer haunts such as the Hamptons. But closer to home, what do real life British coastal grandmothers make of the trend? And how does it feel to be called a style icon?

Denise Melfi, 80
retired nursery worker from Shoreham
"Friends tell me at my age I

shouldn't wear grey and beige. This trend shows you can. All my life I've worn jeans with a nice top. Your style does have to slightly change as you get older, just things like necklines. Everything aimed at people my age seems to be striped. Even my grandchildren say to me: 'Nanny please stop buying stripes.'"

Anne Sadler, 74

Personal assistant from Bury, Lancashire

"Maybe younger women want to dress like this because they want to be comfortable. My trousers are from M&S, my top and denim shirt are both from Bonmarché and I picked up my hat from a market in Suffolk. I like Joanna Lumley's style, especially on her travel shows. She wears lots of floaty clothes and looks chic. At my age you don't want to dress too young but you don't want to dress too much like a grandma either."

Jane Regan, 68

Retired former owner of a media recruitment agency from London, now Hove

"Americans love a preppy look. They are much more conventional than we



▲ Denise Melfi: 'Your style does change slightly as you get older'

are. My style has changed because my body has changed. I wouldn't wear the tiny things I wore in my 20s now. Living in Greece influenced how I now dress for summer. Today I'm wearing a NRBY dress, Spring Court trainers and Jil Sander sunglasses. I love independent shops like Igigi in Hove and Cordelia James in Lewes. I follow Diane Keaton and Linda Rodin on Instagram. They wear really expensive clothes so it's just for inspiration."

Deborah Tilly, 74 Age: 74

Retired makeup artist from London now, now Brighton

"Women in their 20s are dressing like that? Surely not! I think the trend is very American and quite old-fashioned.

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I'm into slightly more eccentric pieces. I bought this Sud dress in Paris, my jewellery in Greece and my glasses are Pagani. I love Havaianas because they are comfortable and I've always worn ballet pumps from French Sole. Six years ago, I went travelling all over New Zealand and South America. Friends of mine who are the exact same age said I was too old. I thought if I don't do it now, I'll never do it. You've got to make your own life."

Anne Munday, 76
retired NHS worker from Bedford
"I like to keep up with trends without overdoing it. When you get to my age you have to be sensible. I'd like to

dress a lot cooler but I would look a bit silly. Since I retired I'm no longer into suits. Meryl Streep and Diane Keaton are my type of people, they look casual but smart. I chose to wear stripes today as I'm visiting my granddaughter, who lives by the seaside."

Karen Knight, 71
Retired radio presenter from Hove
"It's funny to be described as part of this trend. I wouldn't call myself a style icon. I don't think you need to dress frumpy when you get older. You just have to adapt things for those parts of your body you don't want to show. I like mixing more expensive things with cheaper stuff. I wear this top to death as it's light, easy and I don't have to iron it. I'm not a fan of how Diane Keaton

dresses. It suits her but it's quite severe."

Pam Tennant, 80
Retired radiographer from Hove
"I've had most of my clothes for a long time. They don't tend to go out of fashion. I have two daughters in their forties who would tell me if I'm looking old-fashioned. They would like this trend as they tend to dress like it as well. Your style does slightly change as you age, but I don't feel like I dress old. I feel like a 40- or 50-year-old - this is how I have always dressed."

Rachel Lewis, 67
Part-time sales at Eternal boutique, from Hove
"Young people probably like this trend because it's different from their peers. Their usual uniform is very

skimpy, whereas this is floaty. It's amazing to be called stylish. It feels really nice when people compliment you when you are older. You've got to be positive about ageing. I've thought occasionally about a nip and tuck but you've just got to enjoy the stage you are at. You can look younger but you can't be younger, you can only feel that."

Beverley West, 65
Retired maths teacher from Kent
"I'm shocked anyone would admire what I wear. Maybe women in their 20s like this style as they get their first jobs and want to look fairly smart. I've got a basic wardrobe of all my favourite bits that I just chuck on. Since lockdown I haven't done any shopping. I don't want to look frumpy but I don't want

to look like mutton dressed as lamb either. That's always a big fear, dressing too young."

Lesley McBride, 67
Retired civil servant from Hove
"I can see the timeless appeal of this trend. I haven't heard of it but it's just like me. On the high street I love Phase 8 and Next. There's an independent shop in Hove called Jaba Yard that does nice cotton pieces too. Back in the day I loved Laura Ashley. Nowadays I like clean lines and colours. A floral print when you are older can make you look even older."

Is it worth having a flutter on home lash-extensions kits?

Anita Bhagwandas

The hackUsing a Lashify at-home kit to apply your own lash extensions, DIY style.

The promiseThis kit was hailed a saviour over lockdown for those who couldn't have their usual professional lash extensions. It now has a passionate



▲ Illustration: Edith Pritchett/The Guardian
online following, but is Lashify worth

the pricy £145 for the starter kit?
The testAfter watching the YouTube demo several times I clean my lashes with the Lashify Pre-Cleanse (£32) and apply a layer of the included lash glue using its mini mascara wand. Once they are dry enough to feel tacky I use a second glue underneath my lashes, close to the waterline - the glues are different strengths so hold

differently. Then I apply the "gossamer" or mini lash strip (4mm long) to the gluey lash line, holding to "fuse" them, repeating until the full set of six are on, then sealing them with a swipe of the "glass" topcoat.
The verdictInitially, applying a set took me an hour, but I got it down to 20 minutes. They're easier to apply than false lashes, look more natural and

work out cheaper than extensions - although I'm still working on how to remove them tidily enough to reuse them (new gossamers cost around £20 a set). Mine lasted three days, ideal for temporary extra flutter, and a worthwhile investment for false-lash wearers.

How US government diet guidelines ignore the climate crisis

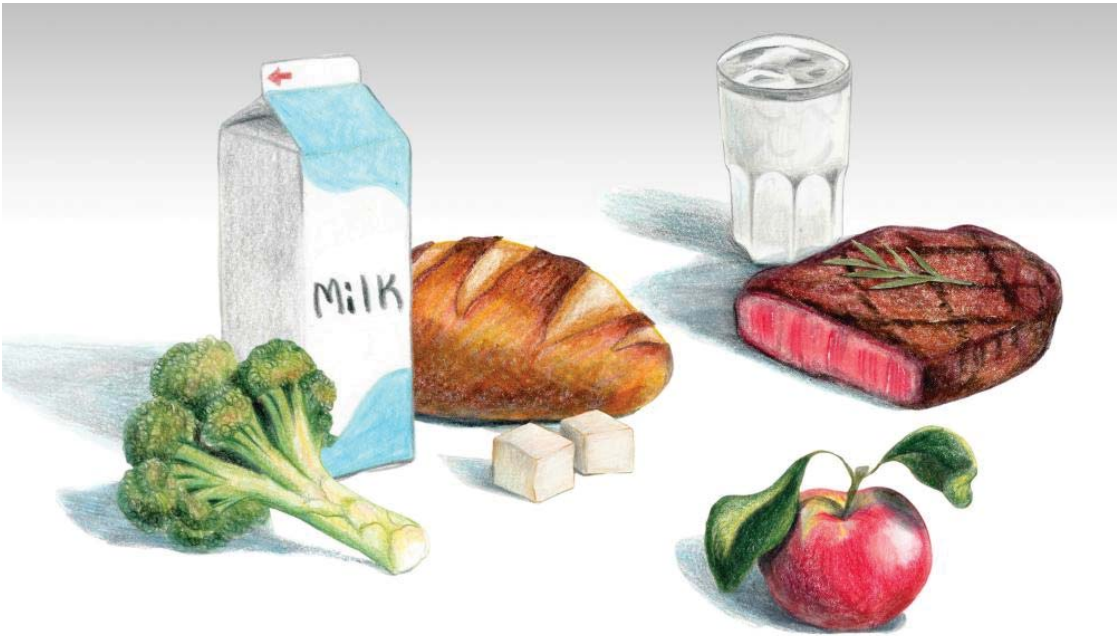
Marina Bolotnikova

To keep the climate habitable, most scientists agree that switching to renewable energy alone isn't enough - Americans also need to change the way they eat. Environmental and public health advocates are pushing a new strategy to help get there: including climate breakdown in the official US dietary guidelines, which shape what goes into billions of meals eaten across the country every year.

Every five years, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services jointly publish a new version of the guidelines. They form the basis for the public-facing eating guide MyPlate, formerly MyPyramid, as well as many government-backed meal programs, such as National School Lunch. Historically, these guidelines have narrowly focused on human nutrition, but some are now saying they should be expanded to incorporate climate considerations as well.

The current, 150-page edition for 2020-2025 doesn't mention food's role in the climate crisis at all. Climate groups say this is an abdication of responsibility, with Americans feeling the effects of a warming planet more than ever. The recently passed Inflation Reduction Act, the most significant climate legislation in US history, does very little to address the food system.

"Climate change poses a multitude of threats to human health and nutrition security. We cannot extricate these



▲ Illustration: Julia Louise Pereira/The Guardian

things from each other," said Jessi Silverman, a senior policy associate for the Center for Science in the Public Interest. Her group and 39 others, including the Union of Concerned Scientists and the American Academy of Pediatrics, in May wrote a letter urging the government to include sustainability in the 2025-2030 dietary guidelines, which are now in development.

A sustainability component would encourage Americans to eat less meat and dairy, which have a significantly higher climate impact than nutritionally comparable plant-based foods. "It would be virtually impos-

ible to even meet the two-degree [Celsius] limit in global temperature change without incorporating substantial reductions in beef intake," said Mark Rifkin, senior food and agriculture policy specialist for the Center for Biological Diversity, another signatory to the letter.

The current guidelines advise Americans to eat far more animal products than is sustainable, said Walter Willett, a professor at Harvard's School of Public Health. The primary dietary chart recommends 26 ounces of protein from meat, poultry and eggs a week, compared with just 5 ounces

from plant-based foods, although there are alternative charts that show how vegetarians can get the same nutrients without meat. They also "still basically say three servings of dairy a day, which is actually really radical because our current consumption is 1.6 servings a day", he said. "To just recommend three servings of dairy and say nothing about the environmental consequences if people really did that is just completely irresponsible."

Because most Americans are deficient in fiber and fruits and vegetables, not animal products, Rifkin, a dietitian, said climate-focused guid-

ance would line up with what the public needs nutritionally. It would also help address other problems that stem from the meat-heavy US food system, he said, including risk of future pandemics, food security and pollution from concentrated animal feeding operations, which disproportionately affects communities of color.

A proposed list of questions released in April for the scientific panel that advises the guidelines didn't include sustainability. That worries advocates, but they say it's still early. Janet de Jesus, HHS's staff lead on the guidelines, said sustainability could still be included. "We're not saying that it's not going to be in the dietary guidelines - we're not saying that at all," de Jesus said. "It's a high priority for HHS leadership to address climate change."

Countries including Germany, Brazil, Sweden and Qatar have addressed sustainability in their dietary guidelines, according to a UN Food and Agriculture Organization report. Canada's Food Guide advises choosing plant-based foods more often for the environment. Germany has cut its per-capita meat consumption by 12% since 2011, Vox reported last month, and its minister of food and agriculture has recently prioritized a shift toward more plant-based eating.

Advocates say a change in the US dietary guidelines could have a similar influence. "The guidelines are much more impactful than I think a lot of people realize," Silverman said. Federal



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food aid programs have to comply with the guidelines, shaping how millions of people eat. The National School Lunch and National School Breakfast, for instance, served more than 7bn meals a year to tens of millions of children before the Covid-19 pandemic. The guidelines also influence cafeteria food served in government buildings, hospitals and other institutions, and are used in nutrition education programs.

National School Lunch's reach makes it "uniquely positioned to affect the dietary patterns of American children and adolescents and could aid in addressing the environmental impacts of food systems", according to a recent paper in Communications

Earth & Environment. Meat contributes disproportionately to school meals' impact on the climate, as well as land and water use.

Because government programs and other large institutions serve so many meals, sustainability advocates in recent years have focused on trying to influence their food buying decisions. California earlier this year allocated \$100m to help schools serve more plant-based meals.

This isn't the first time the environment has been at issue in the nation's dietary guidelines. In 2015, the government-appointed panel of nutrition experts that advised the 2015-2020 guidelines addressed sustainability in its scientific report. "In general, a dietary pattern that is higher

in plant-based foods, such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds, and lower in animal-based foods is more health promoting and is associated with lesser environmental impact," the panel wrote.

But after outcry from the meat industry and Republican lawmakers, the recommendation to eat more plants was dropped from the final guidelines. In an interview with the Wall Street Journal at the time, the USDA secretary, Tom Vilsack, said sustainability was outside the purview of the dietary guidelines and compared the scientific committee to his granddaughter who "colors outside of the lines".

"It's really condescending stuff," said Bob Martin, of the Johns Hopkins

Center for a Livable Future, about Vilsack's comments. "The people involved in this were highly qualified."

Agribusiness has a long history of influence over the dietary guidelines, and it will undoubtedly be a factor this time around, too. The meat and dairy industries spent \$49.5m on political contributions in 2020, and another \$15.9m lobbying the federal government.

Food industry groups also routinely report lobbying on federal nutrition policy. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association between 2014 and 2016 spent more than \$303,000 lobbying to keep beef in the dietary guidelines, according to federal lobbying records. Several industry groups, including the North American Meat Institute, the

International Dairy Foods Association and the National Turkey Federation, have already weighed in on the process for the 2025-2030 guidance. "[W]hile an important topic, sustainability is outside the scope of the Dietary Guidelines," the National Pork Producers Council wrote in a public comment in May.

Even though environmental advocates face an uphill battle, a lot has changed since the failed 2015 effort to incorporate sustainability, said Jessi Silverman of the Center for Science in the Public Interest. "I think the public pressure to have concrete policies to address climate change has grown a lot in the years since then."

‘Completely laughable’: claims that a mine will create ‘more jobs per hectare’ than the Great Barrier Reef derided

Joe Hinchliffe

Claims that Clive Palmer's proposed Central Queensland coalmine would help the Great Barrier Reef - and would generate "more jobs per hectare" - have been derided as "completely laughable" by an environmentalist, economist and First Nations people.

Earlier this month environment minister Tanya Plibersek said she intended to block the coalmine due to its "unacceptable impacts" on the reef world heritage area, which is 10km from the two proposed open cut mines.

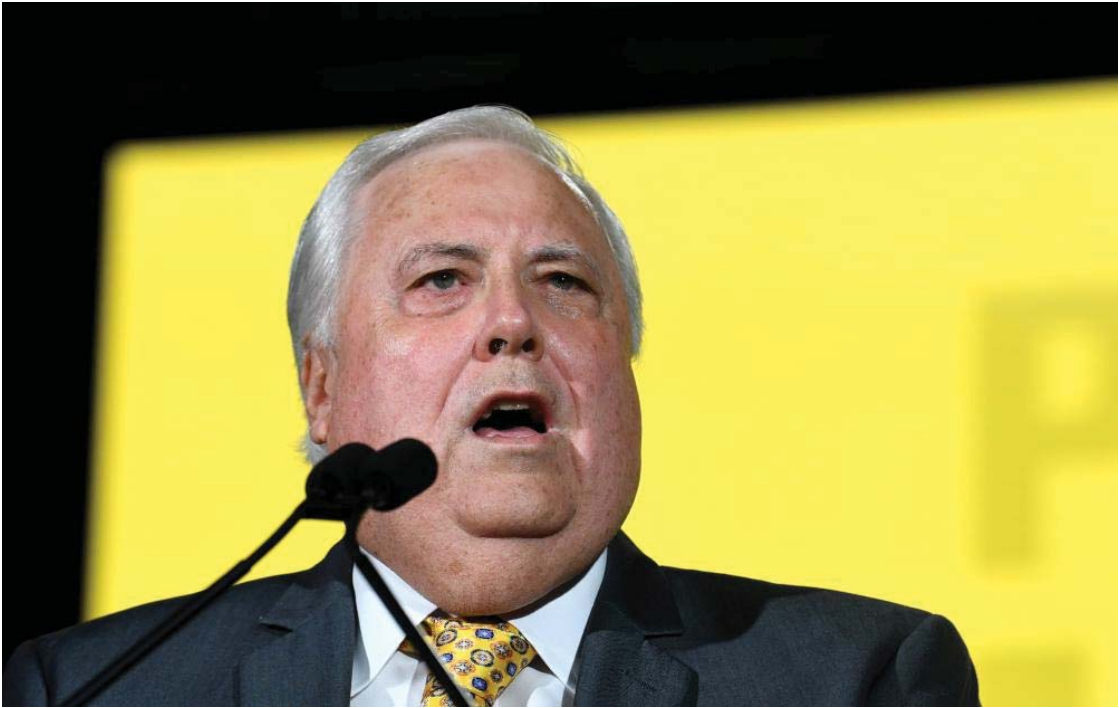
Central Queensland Coal issued a 112-page response to the proposed rejection that outlined, among other claims, that the mine would create "more jobs generated per hectare" than the reef.

"The CQC proposal is a greater economic powerhouse [than the reef] exceeding on multiple levels the revenue and jobs generated per hectare," it reads.

"It can be calculated that the Great Barrier Reef generates \$1,858 per ha, whereas the mine could generate up to \$1,618,799 per hectare at a 871 times multiplier."

The Grattan Institute's energy program director, Tony Wood, described the claim as a "you-must-be-joking" argument.

"It doesn't make any sense," Wood



▲ Clive Palmer also claimed global emissions would soar if the mine was not dug as China would instead burn lower-grade coal. Photograph: Darren England/AAP

said.

"Why would you want to compare jobs per hectare? You can't mine on the Great Barrier Reef and you can't have tourism at a coalmine. They are just not comparable."

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"And most people would put more

value on the barrier reef than just the current value of tourism."

Palmer told the Guardian that global emissions would soar if the mine was not dug, as he said China would source its coal from Indonesia and would burn "three times more" of its lower-grade coal.

"So actually, global warming, we get a positive impact, a reduction," he said

of the scenario under which his mine was approved.

"I'm just trying to be rational about it."

But Australian Marine Conservation Society's Cherry Muddle said global heating was the greatest threat to the reef and that any coal burnt would accelerate the unprecedented coral bleaching it was already experiencing.

"So that argument that burning coal will help the reef is completely laughable," Muddle said.

She said the reef was "more than just jobs and money".

"The Great Barrier Reef is of hugely significant importance for Queenslanders, for our way of life, for fishing for traditional custodians, spiritually, culturally," she said. "It's value is immeasurable."

Wirdi woman Murrawah Johnson said First Nations people were "collateral damage" in discussions around fossil fuel extraction that focused only on economics.

Johnson is co-director of Youth Verdict, which is challenging the Waratah coalmine - another of Palmer's proposals in central Queensland - at the land court under the state's Human Rights Act.

Johnson said many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's cultural rights were already being infringed upon by the climate crisis.

"They're very survival in a sense, cultural survival, and ability to remain on country depends on whether new coalmines and new carbon burning projects are approved or not," she said.

"We can't be building new coalmines in 2022, it just can't happen."

Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant partly reconnected to Ukraine grid

Isobel Koshiw in Kyiv

Ukraine has said it has managed to partly reconnect the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant to its grid after the president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said it had narrowly avoided a "radiation disaster" when all lines to it were cut on Thurs-

day.

The plant was captured in early May by Russian forces, who are reportedly storing equipment at Europe's largest nuclear facility, but is still being run by Ukrainian technicians under the gaze of occupying forces.

Three of the four power connections the plant relies on to keep its reac-

tors cool were previously cut during fighting, and on Thursday, fires around the plant that Zelenskiy blamed on Russian shelling brought down the fourth, disconnecting it for the first time in its history. Russia blamed Ukrainian shelling and on Friday said it had destroyed the gun responsible.

Zelenskiy said the disconnection

had put "Ukraine and all Europeans in a situation one step away from a radiation disaster".

Ukraine's authorities said backup systems had kicked in to ensure the cooling and safety systems at the plant but as of Friday morning, Energoatom, Ukraine's state nuclear agency, said efforts were still under way to link it back

to the Ukrainian grid before announcing success in the early afternoon with the connection of one of its six reactors.

"Zaporizhzhia NPP nuclear power professionals are real heroes! They tirelessly and tightly hold the nuclear and radiation safety of Ukraine and

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the whole of Europe on their shoulders,” wrote Energoatom on its Telegram channel.

The situation however remains fragile as fighting continues around the plant.

Ukrainian authorities and international experts have consistently warned of the potential for nuclear catastrophe because of fighting around the facility, which sits close to the frontlines in the south. Disconnecting from the grid raises the risk of a catastrophic failure of the electricity-run cooling systems for its reactors and spent fuel rods.

A nuclear incident could have disastrous consequences for the immediate population and clouds of radiation could travel across Europe.

A mission from the International Atomic Energy Agency is scheduled to visit the plant next week to monitor the situation and take protective measures, said Lana Zerkal, an adviser to Ukraine’s energy minister, on Ukraine’s Radio NV.

The French president, Emmanuel Macron, said he had received assurances from Zelenskiy and Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, that the mission would be allowed to reach the plant safely. But Zerkal said she remained sceptical that the mission would reach it.

“All the logistical routes are now being worked out,” Zerkal said. “Despite the fact that the Russians agreed that the mission will go through Ukrainian territory, they are artificially creating all the conditions so that the mission does not reach the object given the situation around [the plant].”

Civilians across Ukraine’s south who rely on the plant for electricity, including those in the occupied terri-



▲ The Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant was disconnected twice on Thursday when a blaze affected the fourth and last connection into the plant’s reactors. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

tories, have experienced power outages with the disconnection of the plant. More than 18,000 people in 72 settlements in the Zaporizhzhia region were without power as on Friday, the regional administration said.

People living in occupied areas already face severe problems accessing medicine, basic goods, information and freedom of movement, and those who disagree politically face repressive measures from the new administration. Thousands living along the contact line have been caught up in shelling.

Ukraine and Russia have traded blame over whose shells have damaged the power plant and the surrounding area. The Wall Street Journal reported that Russia was using the plant as a military base and Washington’s Institute for the Study of War

said that Russia had failed to present evidence that the shelling was caused by Ukraine, despite the fact they controlled the territory.

During the outage, the plant still received supplies of electricity from one remaining backup line connected to the nearby conventional power plant, Energoatom said. There were three of these lines before the war, but two have been cut.

If all external connections go down, the plant must rely on diesel-fuelled generators for power. If these break down, engineers only have 90 minutes to stave off dangerous overheating.

Russian and Ukrainian forces have reached a relative impasse, with no significant territorial gains or losses in the last two months. This week, Putin signed a decree to increase the size of

the Russian army by 137,000 men, and the UK’s Ministry of Defence said on Friday it believed he had fired six generals for advancing too slowly.

Also on Friday, Ukraine said it would expand the number of districts on the frontline where civilian evacuations would be mandatory, as those areas could be occupied and face central heating problems this winter.

Russia’s takeover of the plant is the latest in a long list of challenges Russia and its occupying authorities are facing in running newly conquered territories.

Ukrainians continue to use the western-supplied long-range missiles to target infrastructure within enemy lines. Explosions could be heard in occupied Kherson on Friday afternoon as Ukraine’s southern command said it had successfully disabled the Dariiv

Bridge to the north of the city. Russia’s RIA news agency reported that the Russian air defence systems had been activated. It is not clear if the two incidents were connected.

Video footage released on Thursday show the occupying authorities are attempting to build a pontoon bridge across the river to replace the Antonovskiy Bridge struck by Ukrainian forces last month, rendering it unusable.

Russian authorities will hold referendums in newly occupied parts of southern Ukraine, although it appears they will take different forms and may be conducted on different dates.

In the city of Melitopol in the occupied-Zaporizhzhia region, pollsters will go door-to-door instead of voters attending polling stations, according to its mayor-in-exile, Ivan Fedorov, citing sources on the ground.

Authorities are trying to operate while apparently being attacked from within. RIA reported that a bomb exploded in the building from where the referendum was being planned and Russian passports were issued.

In the occupied southern city of Berdiansk, the deputy head of the traffic police was killed on Friday by an explosion, Russia’s state news agency, Tass, reported. On Wednesday, Ivan Sushko, the head of another occupied city nearby, was killed by a car bomb, occupying authorities reported on Telegram.

Their deaths are the latest in a string of assassinations that have targeted members of the occupying authorities. On 23 August, Ihor Telehin, the deputy head of the internal policy department for the occupied Kherson region, was also targeted with a bomb but survived, according to Tass.

Impact of war on Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant – visual guide

Emma Graham-Harrison in Kyiv, Elena Morresi, Chris Watson and Pete Guest

Where is the plant and how significant is it?

The Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant is the largest in Europe and ninth largest in the world. It sits on the eastern bank of the Dnieper River, about 550km (340 miles) south-east of Kyiv.

It was built between 1984 and 1995, and modernised over the last two decades with the help of European Union funds released in the wake of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. That programme meant to finish this year, but was disrupted by the Russian invasion.

The plant has six nuclear reactors, and when all of them are online it can produce 5.7 GW, enough to power roughly 4 million Ukrainian homes. Two are operating at the moment but it is still a vital part of Ukraine’s electric grid.

It has been in the news because of safety concerns after Russia troops took control of the area, stationed military vehicles inside turbine halls, and drew up a risky plan to disconnect it from Ukraine’s grid.

What has happened at the plant since the outbreak of war?



▲ The Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant. Photograph: Planet Labs PBC/AP

The Russian military took over the area in the early days of the war, although the plant is still run by Ukrainian workers.

Here are some key dates since the outbreak of war.

24 February: Russia invades Ukraine, two of six reactors shutdown.

27 February: Fighting first reported in vicinity of the plant.

4 March: Russia seizes the plant after a battle during which a fire breaks out in a training area. Footage of the battle is captured on a security camera.

There is global alarm at the prospect of fighting so close to nuclear reactors. Another reactor is shut down.

Footage published the next day shows some of the damage:

A photograph published on 17 March showed damage to an administrative building at the site:

5 July: Report that Russia has deployed military equipment to the plant, turning it into a base. Footage of Russian vehicles and personnel at the plant emerges in the weeks that follow:

5 August: One of three remaining reactors online is shut down after shelling.

6 August: Alarm over strikes near storage area for radioactive materials.

24 August: Ukraine’s nuclear chief says Russia has a plan to disconnect the

plant from the grid, and has filled the turbine halls of two reactors that are still operational with military vehicles:

25 August: The plant is temporarily disconnected from Ukraine’s national grid for first time in nearly 40 years of operation, after final power line connecting the plant to the grid is cut twice by fires at the ash pits of a nearby coal-fired power plant.

How has war affected the plant and its workers?

About 9,000 of a 11,000-strong workforce have chosen to stay on to keep the reactors operating safely, despite extremely difficult working conditions, including mass detentions and assaults.

One worker was beaten to death, another so badly assaulted he spent three months in hospital and about 200 workers have been detained, Petro Kotin, the head of Energoatom, told the Guardian.

They have chosen to stay on because without them the risks of some kind of accident that would affect not just the local area or Ukraine, but possibly many neighbouring countries, would be much higher.

Although the plant was originally built to Soviet designs, updates to the system means Russian engineers do not know how to run it safely, Kotin



▲ Photograph: Energoatom State Company/Reuters

said.

What might happen next?

Ukraine has warned that Russia is contemplating disconnecting the plant from Ukraine’s national grid and connecting it to Russia’s power network.

This would be extremely dangerous, because the plant’s cooling systems rely on electricity to work, and if back up diesel generators fail the reactors could only operate safely for 90 minutes.

This may be the biggest danger, but Kotin warned that Russia’s management of the site is reckless. Military trucks block access to the turbine halls next to reactors, so if a blaze broke out firefighters might struggle to tackle it.

And even if Russia does not attempt a switch, three out of four main power lines to the site are down, along with two out of three backups. On Thursday,

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the last remaining power line was disrupted twice, leading the plant to be

cut off from the national grid for the first time since reactors began operation nearly 40 years ago. All sides have called for a delegation

from the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, to visit and inspect the site. Kotin said that could happen within one to two weeks,

with all sides hammering out practical details. World leaders have urged Russia not to attempt the switch between

grids, and called on Moscow to remove military equipment and personnel from the site.

Just Stop Oil protesters blockade central London petrol stations

Damien Gayle

Environmental protesters have taken action at petrol stations in central London, vandalising pumps, blockading entrances and spray painting “no new oil” across signs.

The Just Stop Oil campaign said 51 of its supporters took part in the demonstrations at seven petrol stations on Friday morning. Some groups staged sit-down protests at entrances or glued themselves to pumps, while others moved from station to station damaging pumps.

“Today’s action was timed to coincide with the announcement by Ofgem of a massive increase in electricity bills for October, which will push millions more into poverty, forced to choose between heating and eating,” the group said.

Friday’s protests were the third day of actions taken by supporters of Just Stop Oil this week, after it took a hiatus over the summer. The group says it is building up towards mass blockades of Westminster in October.



▲ Two women carrying a banner walk past other protesters at a BP petrol station in west London on Friday morning. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

The Metropolitan police tweeted: “Protesters have targeted a number of petrol stations this morning, causing disruption [and] damaging pumps. Officers are at each of the targeted locations, we have made a number of arrests [and] specialist teams are removing those who are glued to pumps.”

Phoebe Frewer, from Brighton, was among nine protesters blocking access to a BP garage on Western Avenue at

about 6.30am. Electronic displays on the pumps were smashed and spray painted, the station’s signage graffitied, and police were parked nearby with blue lights flashing. One activist was arrested and taken away, according to others on the scene.

“We have picked this location because it is in the 99th percentile of the worst pollution in the UK,” Frewer, 20, said. “There’s a study by Imperial Col-

lege London in 2019 and they basically said that every year on average about 4,000 die from air pollution in London alone.

“That equates to about 11 deaths a day. That’s why we’re here at this location specifically.”

Selma Heimedinger, 22, from Hampshire, sat nearby glued to the hose of a smashed petrol pump, with two other protesters. She told the Guardian: “We are taking action here today because oil is killing people now around the world and in the UK, and the government thinks it’s OK to go ahead with 40 new oil and gas licences.

“We have eight years to do a transition to renewable energy and all the science tells us we can have no new fossil fuels, and yet the government thinks it is OK to plough on as if everything is OK.”

Just Stop Oil began its renewed campaign of direct action on Tuesday, with blockades of major oil terminals in Essex and Warwickshire, followed by actions at service stations on the M25 motorway on Wednesday.

Actions on Thursday were called



▲ A woman sprays a message reading ‘no new oil’ on a sign outside a BP petrol station during the Just Stop Oil protest on Friday. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

off due to heavy rain. Some protesters remain in tunnels beneath two access roads to Essex oil terminals, one of which has been closed while the other remains open.

The campaign started on 1 April, and its supporters have vowed to continue to take action until the government agrees to a moratorium on all new oil and gas extraction projects.

Just Stop Oil said: “This is the moment to come together and resist. We are not prepared to just watch while they destroy everything we love. We’re done with begging. Voting has changed nothing. We are going to stop new oil whether those in power agree or not.”

Queensland resources minister approves expansion of New Acland coalmine

Joe Hinchliffe

A mothballed thermal coalmine on some of Australia’s richest agricultural soil is preparing to revive operations after taking a major step towards gaining final government approval.

Queensland’s resources minister, Scott Stewart, announced the expansion of New Acland in a two-line release issued Friday afternoon, saying he was approving New Hope Group’s mining leases for stage three of the open cut mine “after careful consideration”.

The project still requires a water licence.

Stage three would revive the mothballed mine near the town of Oakey, north-west of Toowoomba, and lift its output from 4.8m tonnes to 7.8m tonnes a year. New Hope exhausted its last coal reserves at the mine in late November, but approval would extend its life for 12 years to 2034.

The New Acland expansion was granted environmental approval in late June.

New Hope responded to Friday’s announcement with a statement to the stock market saying it had “begun preparations for resumption of mining operations”.

The company said it “continues to work collaboratively with representatives from the Department of



▲ New Hope exhausted its last coal reserves at the New Acland mine last November, but approval would extend its life for 12 years to 2034. Photograph: Dan Peled/AAP

Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water in anticipation of the grant of the associated water licence”.

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The company’s chair, Robert Miller, said the mine “remains at risk of ongoing delays caused by objectors utilising the court system to engage in

‘lawfare’ to slow down the approval process”.

The mine has been the target of a decade-long campaign by environmentalists and farmers, who responded with dismay and defiance to Friday’s news.

The Oakey Coal Action Alliance’s secretary, Paul King, said landowners “won’t let the matter rest” despite the

“disturbing” news.

“We’ll take every step that we can take to ensure this mine never goes ahead, regardless of this approval,” he said.

“There are other obstacles that this mine needs to overcome.”

King said Stewart “wasn’t considering the livelihoods of farmers” or the long-term prospects of Acland “as a

farming district rather than the mining district”.

“This is a missed opportunity to send a message,” he said. “It’s out of step with current thinking.”

The mine has been under investigation since 2018 over “alleged unauthorised disturbance” in an area known as west pit.

But days before it was given environmental approval, the Queensland government announced it had accepted an environmental undertaking proposed by New Hope Group, which would see them commit \$2m to habitat rehabilitation to avoid the matter going to court.

On Friday the state opposition’s resources spokesperson, Pat Weir, whose electorate of Condamine encompasses the mine, said the expansion should have been rubber stamped years ago”.

Weir said the Palaszczuk government had been “embarrassed” and “forced” into approving the project mine.

The Greens MP for Maiwar, Michael Berkman, took to Twitter to criticise “the cowards in the Labor” state government who had “bowed to LNP” and “News Corp pressure”.

“These cowardly hypocrites clearly don’t care about climate, the farmers or the future of [Queensland] coal communities,” Berkman wrote. “Shame on [Queensland] Labor.”

UK fertility watchdog considers laws for gene editing and lab-grown eggs

Hannah Devlin Science correspondent

Human genome editing and lab-grown eggs that could theoretically allow same-sex couples to have biological children are among the anticipated scientific advances being discussed by the fertility watchdog to “future-proof” any prospective laws.

As it pushes for the biggest overhaul of fertility laws in 30 years, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) is planning for a range of new reproductive treatments that scientists say could be just a few years away, according to a leading scientist advising the HFEA on its proposals.

The HFEA believes the 1990 act that governs the fertility sector needs updating and has previously said it will seek greater powers to fine clinics and changes to rules on donor anonymity, in recommendations that it will put to the government later this year. Now, a leading scientist who is advising the HFEA on its proposals says the regulator is also discussing whether to recommend changes that could pave the way for the use of lab-grown eggs and sperm, and human genome editing, if these techniques are shown to be sufficiently safe and medically justified.

In theory, lab-grown eggs and sperm could allow same-sex couples to have a biological child together – although scientists are yet to demonstrate the technique using human cells.

“The techniques aren’t there yet. But the rate of progress with either of those is so fast that it will happen,” said Prof Robin Lovell-Badge, the head of stem cell biology and developmental genetics at the Francis Crick Institute in London and a member of the HFEA’s legislative reform committee. “People



▲ A number of reproductive treatments could be just a few years away from the clinic. Photograph: Andriy Popov/Alamy

might be surprised but they shouldn’t be. The science progresses much faster than the law.”

The HFEA will launch a consultation on the issue next month and is expected to make wide-reaching recommendations on how the 1990 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act should be updated by the end of the year.

There is no guarantee that any proposals will be taken forward by government, but the debate reflects rapid scientific advances that have, to a degree, gone under the radar with public attention focused on the pandemic.

Scientists have already created viable eggs and sperm from reprogrammed skin cells in mice and have used the technique to produce pups with either two genetic fathers or two

mothers. Several teams are making advances in research using non-human primates and at least two companies with significant financial backing are aiming to translate the work into humans.

“It’s felt that for humans it’s not far off. It is going to become urgent pretty quickly,” said Lovell-Badge. “If you could take a skin cell and make sperm or eggs, that gives people a chance to have a genetically related child that they couldn’t otherwise have, which a lot of people would say is valid.”

In theory, the technique could also help people who do not have viable eggs and sperm, such as those who have undergone certain cancer treatments.

“If it’s developed somewhere, people in the UK will want it,” he added. “Surely it’s better to have the regu-

lations almost in place to allow it to happen in a controlled way.”

Genome editing of embryos is likely to take longer to be clinic-ready, according to Lovell-Badge, but could also be transformative for dealing with a range of heritable diseases. Currently it is possible to screen embryos for genes linked to conditions such as cystic fibrosis and muscular dystrophy using pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD). But this can require couples to go through many cycles of IVF and in some scenarios, such as when both parents carry two copies of the gene that causes sickle cell disease, PGD cannot help.

Further work is needed to ensure genome editing works efficiently, without causing unintended changes to DNA that would be passed on to future generations. There is particular caution

after the 2018 scandal in which a Chinese scientist, He Jiankui, claimed to have edited the genomes of twin baby girls. Jiankui prompted global condemnation and was subsequently jailed.

Lovell-Badge said there was “more nervousness” on the HFEA committee about human genome editing. However, public attitudes appeared fairly positive, with a recent poll commissioned by the charity Progress Educational Trust (PET) finding that 53% of people would back altering the DNA of embryos to prevent severe or life-threatening diseases.

Other proposals under discussion include establishing an embryo bank so that a greater proportion of embryos left over from fertility treatment could, with patient consent, be used for research. Most are currently discarded, which Lovell-Badge described as morally questionable.

The HFEA is also considering whether to recommend extending the 14-day limit for embryo research and whether similar rules should apply to synthetic embryos, which look increasingly like the real thing but are not regulated under existing laws.

Clare Ettinghausen, the director of strategy and corporate affairs at the HFEA, said: “The HFEA is looking at what changes might need to be made to fertility law.

“The act has provided a robust but flexible framework in which innovations in bioscience and clinical expertise in the UK have flourished. However, it is time to look at how it can be future proofed.” She added: “The HFEA is considering a range of options that will benefit patients, clinic staff and researchers, and we will be consulting on changes soon.”

Four radical new fertility treatments just a few years away from clinics

Hannah Devlin Science correspondent

The fertility watchdog is pushing for the biggest overhaul of fertility laws in 30 years and discussing how to “future proof” any new fertility laws to make sure they can deal with current and future radical scientific advances.

Here are four of the new reproductive treatments that scientists say could be just a few years away from the clinic.

Lab-grown eggs and sperm

Scientists are making significant advances in the ability to grow eggs and sperm in the laboratory. The ultimate goal is to take adult skin cells, transform them into “induced pluripotent stem cells” that have the ability to turn into other cell types and then, using a cocktail of chemicals, coax these cells along the developmental pathway to becoming either eggs or sperm cells.

This may sound biologically



▲ Embryos of synthetic mice being grown in a laboratory in Israel in August. Photograph: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP/Getty Images

improbable, but scientists have already achieved the feat in mice, producing healthy pups. In theory, a female skin

cell could be used to produce a sperm cell and vice versa, which would be revolutionary.

Translating this work into human cells is not straightforward. There are still big scientific hurdles to overcome, and demonstrating safety would be a lengthy process. But there is growing confidence that this will eventually be possible and already there are companies, such as the US-based Conception, aiming to bring the most recent advances to the clinic.

Human genome editing

Genome editing is a method for making specific changes to the DNA of a cell or organism. Gene therapy, where new genes are added or faulty genes disabled in specific cells, is already used in medicine to treat genetic diseases.

Changing the DNA of an embryo goes a step further because the genetic changes would occur in every cell in the body, meaning the edits would be

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passed on to subsequent generations. The technique could allow people to avoid passing on heritable diseases. However, in many cases, pre-implantation screening of embryos can achieve this goal and research has shown that gene editing tools risk producing “off target” changes. So there will be a very high bar for demonstrating that the technology is safe

enough to be medically justified. **Three-person baby IVF** The last big amendment to UK fertility law came in 2015 when MPs voted for an amendment to allow a technique called mitochondrial transfer, designed to eliminate certain incurable genetic diseases. The technique involves swapping the egg’s mitochondrial DNA (a tiny fraction of the total DNA, which sits outside the egg’s nucleus) with that of a healthy donor.

At present, only two specific techniques are permitted, but many people would like the law made more flexible so that new techniques with the same objective could be licensed. It is possible that in future the technique could have wider applications, for instance if faulty mitochondria were identified as a cause of infertility. **Synthetic embryos** UK fertility laws regulate the use of embryos in research, and place a 14-

day limit on how far into development embryos can be cultivated in the lab. However, the HFEA has no remit over so-called synthetic embryos. This month, two teams of scientists report creating these embryo-like structures, featuring a beating heart and primitive brain, from mouse cells. The synthetic embryos look essentially the same as “real” embryos but do not require an egg or sperm to produce. The same scientists are trying to replicate

the work in human cells, and some think new legal guidelines are required. Separately, many scientists would like to see the “14-day rule” relaxed to allow them to get a better understanding of human development, including why many pregnancies fail at an early stage.

Nichelle Nichols to become latest Star Trek star to have ashes sent into space

Reuters

The late actor Nichelle Nichols, best known as Lieutenant Uhura on Star Trek, will become the latest member of the 1960s television series to be memorialized by having some of her earthly remains flown into space. Nichols, who died on 30 July at age 89, is credited with helping shatter racial stereotypes and redefining Hollywood roles for Black actors at the height of the US civil rights movement, as one of the first Black women to portray an empowered character on network television. Now she has been added to the posthumous passenger manifest of a real-life rocketship due to carry a collection of vials containing cremated ashes and DNA samples from dozens of departed space enthusiasts on a final, and eternal voyage around the sun, according to organizers of the tribute. A date for the launch has not yet been set. Other Star Trek cast members and executives who have had remains launched into space include James Doohan, who played the show’s chief engineer Scotty, and Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry.



▲ Nichelle Nichols, an original Star Trek cast member, is credited with helping shatter racial stereotypes for Black actors at the height of the civil rights movement. Photograph: Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP

Also joining the launch will be the remains of Roddenberry’s wife, Majel Barrett-Roddenberry, who played nurse Christine Chapel on the series, and the renowned sci-fi visual effects artist Douglas Trumbull, whose work was featured in such films as 2001: A Space Odyssey and Star Trek: The Motion Picture. The launch is organized by Celestis Inc, a Texas-based company that has created a unique niche in the burgeoning commercial space sector by offering a measure of cosmic immortality to customers that can afford a dramatic

send-off, which contracts with private rocket ventures. Celestis has not publicly divulged the fees and other financial details of its service. The upcoming memorial flight will be aboard a Vulcan Centaur rocket, still under development by the Boeing and Lockheed Martin joint venture United Launch Alliance (ULA). Plans call for the 200-plus capsules carrying human remains and DNA for what Celestis is calling its Enterprise Flight to go inside the upper rocket stage that will fly on into deep space, beyond the gravitational pull of the Earth and moon and eventually enter a perpetual solar orbit, said Charles Chafer, co-founder and chief executive officer of Celestis. “It’s a wonderful memorial for her, an eternal one,” said Nichols’ son Kyle Johnson. In the 1970s, Nichols was hired by Nasa to help recruit more marginalized groups and women to the space agency, where she was influential in attracting such talent as the first female US astronaut, Sally Ride, the first Black female astronaut, Mae Jemison, and the first Black Nasa chief, Charlie Bolden.

Sunak is so desperate to be prime minister that he has decided to rewrite Covid history

Rachel Clarke

In an extraordinary - and impeccably timed, from the point view of his Tory leadership campaign - interview with the Spectator, Rishi Sunak has felt compelled to out himself as the scrappy underdog of the cabinet’s Covid strategy battles. No one but him, he claims, even considered the potential harms of lockdown, such as missed doctors appointments, the NHS backlog or children not attending school. “That was never part of it ... those meetings were literally me around that table, just fighting. It was incredibly uncomfortable every single time,” he said. He also says he objected to what he called the “fear narrative”, the messaging from the government about the dangers of the virus. Releasing posters of people on ventilators was the worst, he said. It’s a potent image, isn’t it? All that



▲ ‘Sunak is courting votes, twisting what actually happened to fit a narrative certain voters want to hear.’ Photograph: Getty Images

fearlessness and resolve rippling beneath a cashmere hoodie. Sunak, in his own eyes, was nothing less than a one-man crusade for common sense and human rights in the face of evangelical lockdown monomania. Even more arresting is Sunak’s root cause analysis of how the UK came to suffer. The government’s fatal mistake, he claims, was to “empower” the independent scientists of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) to such an extent that they “screwed” the country. Well. Even *with* lockdowns, according to the latest death certificate data, more than 170,000 people have died of Covid since the pandemic began. Just how many more tens of thousands of casualties would be required for Sunak to concede that actually lockdowns served a vital purpose? The fact is, in almost every line of

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the interview – clearly an attempt to pander to the libertarian wing of the party faithful – Sunak is talking nonsense. He alleges, for instance, that Sage “had the power to decide whether the country would lock down or not”. But that’s entirely wrong. Sage’s role was, and remains, advisory. It’s up to the executive to make the tough decisions, a concept that I believe is known as leadership.

In reality, Sage was so impotent that after a few brief months of “following the science” – or at least purporting to do so – Downing Street swiftly went off piste. In September 2020, for example, Sage implored Johnson to lock down in order to avoid a catastrophic second wave. As Sage member Prof Stephen

Reicher explained in this newspaper at the time: “On 21 September the scientific advisory body Sage produced a paper with a simple message: do something now or else lose control over the virus. That ‘something’ would have to be sufficient to reduce infections to a level where the virus could be controlled without shutting businesses and curtailing livelihoods.” The government chose to ignore Sage and sure enough Britain found itself, in Reicher’s words, “occupying the worst of all worlds: a limbo where the pandemic drags on and causes more damage, leaving us hopeless and praying for a vaccine”.

Sunak also alleges evasiveness, spin and lack of transparency from Sage, claiming that the committee would issue horrifying scenarios about what would come to pass if Britain did not

impose lockdown, without revealing the basis upon which they had been calculated: “I was like: ‘Summarise for me the key assumptions, on one page, with a bunch of sensitivities and rationale for each one.’ In the first year I could never get this.” But this too is claptrap. Take, for example, the Imperial College modelling which influenced the decision to lock down for the first time in March 2020. That model predicted 250,000 deaths without any interventions. It was published, in its entirety – raw data, statistical analyses, executive summary and bullet point conclusions – on 16 March 2020. Perhaps Sunak, who must have missed it at the time, would like to read it here?

I can only conclude that Sunak is so desperate to be prime minister, he has decided to take a populist punt

at rewriting Covid history. He reminds me of Dean Russell, the Tory MP who took on Chris Whitty last December by crassly asking him: “People are concerned we’re prioritising Covid over other things, especially with the Omicron variant. You know, Covid over cancer, Covid over other serious issues. What would you say to that?”

Whitty’s response, blistering in its understatement, applies to Sunak as much as Russell: “This is sometimes said by people who have no understanding of health at all. And when they say it, it’s usually because they want to make a political point. The idea that the lockdowns cause the problems with things like cancer is a complete inversion of the reality. If we’d not had the lockdowns, the whole system would be in deep, deep trouble and the im-

pacts on things like heart attacks and strokes and all the other things people must still come forward for when they had them, would have been even worse than it was.”

Sunak is courting votes, twisting what actually happened to fit a narrative certain voters want to hear. Worse, the misinformation he’s spouting is dangerous. It encourages the public to think the worst of scientists, only exacerbating mistrust and division. The fact is, scientists weren’t empowered enough – and were used at times as human shields for political incompetence and procrastination. Shame on Sunak for debasing himself.

Rachel Clarke is a palliative care doctor and the author of *Breathtaking: Inside the NHS in a Time of Pandemic*

US firm behind Tasmanian tiger ‘de-extinction’ plan uses influencers to promote research

Donna Lu

The US firm behind the effort to resurrect the Tasmanian tiger has taken the unusual step of engaging social media influencers to promote its research.

The announcement last week that Australian and US scientists had launched a multimillion-dollar project to bring back the thylacine received wide coverage.

The resurrection effort is a collaboration between Colossal Biosciences, a Texas-based biotechnology firm specialising in “de-extinction”, and researchers at the University of Melbourne.

The ambitious project, which has seen a mixed response from the scientific community, seeks to reintroduce the carnivorous marsupial to its native Tasmania, where it died out in the 1930s.

Several influencers have produced promotional content for Colossal on Instagram and TikTok, using the hashtag #ColossalPartner.

Among them is Kendall Long in the US, a self-described “curiosity lover” and science enthusiast and former contestant on *The Bachelor*; and Laura Wells, an Australian presenter.

Nick Uhas, an American TV host with more than 7 million followers on TikTok, has previously promoted the firm’s plan to revive the woolly mammoth and reintroduce the animal to the Arctic tundra.



▲ Colourised picture of the last-known surviving Tasmanian tiger from footage taken in 1933. The resurrection effort is a collaboration between Colossal Biosciences and the University of Melbourne Photograph: The National Film and Sound Arch/AFP/Getty Images

Prof Kristofer Helgen, the Australian Museum’s chief scientist, said he was aware influencers were promoting the de-extinction project via Twitter and other online platforms.

Helgen is convinced, based on the molecular biology of thylacines, that the de-extinction project is not feasible. “I don’t think that it is possible to recreate a thylacine in the way that has been described. I feel very strongly that the underlying science is not there,” he said.

“Some caution is warranted. You’d want some peer review and some expertise involved in vetting the kind of story that’s being told about what the scientists are planning to do,” Helgen said.

“Instead ... we’re seeing a very different corporate approach, which is asking social influencers – who may not know too much about marsupial biology, for example, but have large followings or science-oriented followings – to pump out media that’s posi-

tive,” he said. “This company stands to make money from the publicity.”

Dr Belinda Barnet, a senior lecturer in media at Swinburne University, said: “Although many brands employ the use of influencers now, mainly because they are effective at getting attention and media coverage, this is not common practice in research.

“A research project is not meant to be a brand. You’re not trying to sell something. So the fact that this has happened should tell us something

about research culture, and about how competitive funding has become,” she said.

“I can see why Colossal Biosciences might try it; perhaps a media profile will attract more investment.”

Among Colossal’s investors are the Hensworth brothers, Paris Hilton, the management firm founded by the Winklevoss twins, and Thomas Tull, the former chief executive of Legendary Entertainment.

“We actively engage in efforts to help educate the public and reach younger generations in their social media platforms of choice,” said Colossal’s chief executive, Ben Lamm, in a statement. “Everyone is competing for audience attention. Funding this education on next-gen social channels is critical to reach younger audiences. It is not about getting support from influencers but in actually getting the message out.”

Paying influencers to promote science is unusual but not unheard of. Last year, the UK Institute of Physics spent “tens of thousands of pounds” on a social media campaign on TikTok.

Five TikTokers were paid to stand on boxes of eggs without breaking them, with the aim to “reach more young people with positive messages about physics”, the IOP’s Ray Mitchell told *Nature* in March.

Prof Andrew Pask at the University of Melbourne, whose laboratory is collaborating on the thylacine project, was unavailable for comment.

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Finally, a Viral Post Generator for LinkedIn posts so you can spend more time on #career #goals

Jennifer Wong

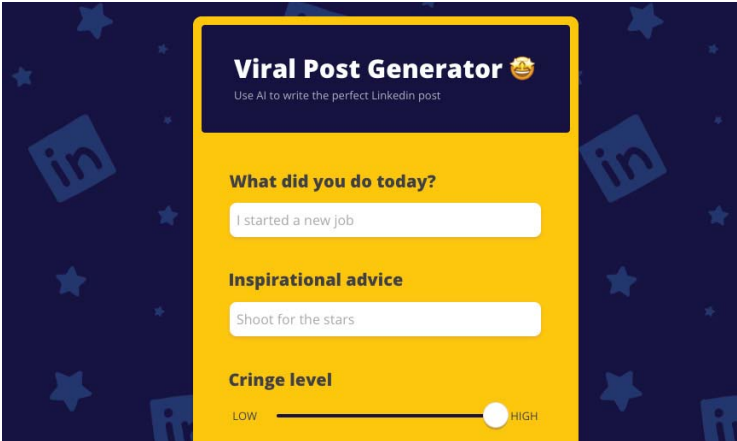
I'm so humbled that the Guardian asked me to write an article about the LinkedIn Viral Post Generator. Humbled, but not surprised, if I'm honest, after so many years of grinding! #wor-thit

It's a HUGE MILESTONE in my career to cover a story about AI that generates cringy viral posts for LinkedIn so you don't have to (#winning). It just goes to show that if you put in the effort, you'll be rewarded 10 times over.

You can learn that from me - it's my very own "inspirational advice" that I inserted into the generator. And it's the reason that you're thinking right now, "How am I still reading this?" and yet you cannot look away, such is the power of AI - just kidding, I am a real person writing this :)

It all began two days ago. I asked my editor if I could write an article about the AI generator invented by Tom Orbach using 100,00 real LinkedIn posts to teach it the language of inspirational cringe.

"Are you sure you're ready to write



▲ 'My advice as an influencer? Write as if you are a bot.' Photograph: Viral Post Generator / Tom Orbach

about that?" she asked.

I have been blessed to have some wonderful editors throughout my career, but I couldn't believe she was doubting me.

Straight away I told her, "I am." And then I sat in front of her and wrote this article right before her very eyes.

Oh yeah. It felt amazing. I asked myself why.

Why did it mean so much to me to write about a website where you could type in your achievement and

your words of advice, and then select a "cringe" level, after which a viral LinkedIn post would be generated?

Why?

Ordinary people get good ideas every day, but why was I blessed with THIS story idea?

I think I know the reason. Here's why:

HR: *There's a two-year gap in your CV.*

Me: *Yes, I was studying a course in investment.*

HR: *Please elaborate.*

Me: *I was investing ... in myself.*

HR: *Welcome to the company. We are here. Just like you.*

See, when you invest in yourself, you don't put up with editors questioning whether you're not good enough to write about an AI generator for viral LinkedIn posts.

Because one day, after YEARS of putting up with this, it all changes.

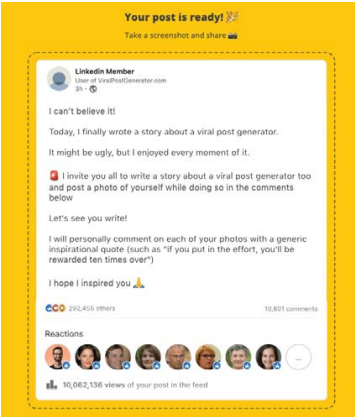
Finally, now, for the first time in my life, I have the RIGHT MINDSET. Instead of writing about something else, I insist on writing this article. Not doing this earlier was my BIG MISTAKE.

Moral of the story? Don't try to write like an AI generator if you don't secretly believe you could be an AI generator. Just don't.

As I begin to reach the end of this article, I am honoured and thrilled to announce that I have finished the beginning and middle of this piece.

There were countless others who began writing articles today, and yet - this is the piece you are reading!!!

Now, here's the thing: I'm not special just because I wrote the introduction and the body of this article. Other people write introductions and



▲ Cringe level: High Photograph: Viral Post Generator / Tom Orbach

bodies of articles too.

But I *am* unique because of my mindset: Be the AI you want to see in your viral post generator.

Only because of that, I got to where I am today. Yay me!

My advice as an influencer? Apart from asking lots of rhetorical questions? Write as if you are a bot. The rest will happen on its own.

#ididit

Nick Kyrgios in form of his life and under intense scrutiny at US Open

Emma Kemp

You wouldn't know Nick Kyrgios is getting sued based on his Instagram page. While a Wimbledon fan he accused of being drunk was preparing her legal papers, the subject of her litigation was cruising around Manhattan in a rickshaw, a Book of Mormon program in hand, grooving to beats, enjoying the Times Square tourist jaunt. "LUV NY," he captioned the video.

Start spreading the news, he's leaving today. Kyrgios is in New York and everyone is watching. Rarely does the Australian not command international attention, but perhaps never has there been so much of it as now, in the week before the US Open begins. On the court he is a Wimbledon finalist with the potential to win his first grand slam. A slouching, sauntering vessel of expectation whose game has hit its raps-callion best. Off it, he is distracted on two different fronts.

On Tuesday, the woman Kyrgios claimed "had about 700 drinks, bro" and had distracted him during his Wimbledon final loss to Novak Djokovic said she had decided to bring defamation proceedings against him over his "entirely baseless" comments about her to the chair umpire. It came hours after his lawyer attended a court hearing on his behalf in Canberra after he was sum-



▲ Wimbledon finalist Nick Kyrgios enters the US Open in the kind of form that could net him his first grand slam singles title. Photograph: Paul Chiasson/AP

moned to appear to face a charge of assaulting his former girlfriend.

About 16,000km away, Kyrgios appears insouciant. Doing his thing, seemingly immune to the noise. Classic Kyrgios. What is he thinking? Is he worried? Indifferent? Even if he tells us, we probably won't have the answer until he gets on the court, where each brilliant serve and unbeatable winner and every blazing blow-up says more than any words could.

Kyrgios has capitalised on a funny year in tennis. In the past six months the 27-year-old has climbed from a world singles ranking of 137th to 26th, playing his way through Europe, UK, US and Canada and beating the world No 1,

Daniil Medvedev, in the latter.

His first major final, in London, was the product of compelling performances by anyone's standards, another confirmation of what his talent is capable of. The talent bit was never in dispute. As ever, with Kyrgios, it is the question of whether he will continue to use it to its full potential.

Was that fortnight to be the start of something big? Would he now be a contender at every grand slam? Or would it prove a mirage? As it stands, Kyrgios has never made it past the third round of the US Open. The last time he got that far was 2019, before Covid hit and he took a break from the international circuit.

This time, unlike the glorified exhibition tournament that was Wimbledon 2022, he will be playing for rankings points. And this time, also unlike London's mild-mannered All England Club set (the tabloid press aside), he will do so in front of the baying mob at Flushing Meadows, in the city that never sleeps. If he can make it there, he'll make it anywhere.

He is at least seeded. That appeared unlikely after Wimbledon, when he fell from world No 40 to 45 despite reaching the final because of the ATP's and WTA's decision to strip the tournament of its rankings status. But his hard work on the court in recent months means he enters the US Open seeded 23rd, meaning he plays a lower-ranked opponent in the first round.

That his opponent just happens to be his good friend and grand slam-winning doubles partner Thanasi Kokkinakis only ensures the spotlight will be turned on from the outset at Flushing Meadows. Box office from the word go - it would not be any other way with Kyrgios.

"It was a goal, more so I didn't get one of the big titans or gods first round," Kyrgios said this month after defeating the Australian No 1, Alex de Minaur, in Canada. "I can actually work my way into the draw if the draw's kind. But look, I always feel my game is right there no matter who I play."



▲ In a fortnight Kyrgios could be king of the hill - or he could bow out in round one. Photograph: Minas Panagiotakis/Getty Images

At the end of the day, Kyrgios may be at the mercy of his own body. With last week's resounding straight-sets Cincinnati Masters loss to American Taylor Fritz emerged a knee injury, suggesting the strain of a busy calendar - also featuring a heavy doubles schedule - is catching up.

"You can hear the boos around the stadium," said Greg Rusedski, a former US Open finalist and world No 4. "They don't feel like he gave it his best effort out there and we're hoping the knee isn't too serious, but he's got to show more. He's improved out of sight but physically he's got to get stronger.

"You're worried about the knee physically. It's a lot easier to do on grass courts than hard courts."

But hard courts it will be. In a fortnight Kyrgios could be king of the hill, top of the heap - a US Open champion. Or he could bow out in round one. Good luck predicting which.

How Serena and Venus Williams changed women's tennis for ever

Tumaini Carayol in New York

As Serena Williams stood two wins away from one of the ultimate achievements in her sport, it all seemed to be falling apart. For 10 months between 2002 and 2003, she had established a level of dominance not seen since the greats of the previous century. On a warm January night in Melbourne, though, she was on the brink of a crushing defeat, trailing Kim Clijsters 1-5 in the third set of their 2003 Australian Open semi-final.

But Williams had won three grand slam tournaments in a row for a reason. This was a time when she seemed almost unbeatable in the biggest moments. Defeat was one mistake away, but she eradicated all unforced errors from her game as Clijsters cowered. Williams saved two match points, she won six games in a row and then she held off her sister, Venus, in their fourth successive grand slam final to seal the "Serena Slam".

It was a classic Serena Williams moment, scrapping until the death, a mentality that has defined her career and driven her success. "Until you're shaking hands with them, they do not think they're going to lose," laughs Mary Carillo, the former doubles champion turned broadcaster. "They really don't believe it. And that, I think, was a thing that the other players in the locker room really felt: 'You can have a set and a break lead on me, but do you really think you're going to beat me?'"

With constant demonstrations of her physical and mental fortitude, Williams changed the face of the sport alongside her sister, setting the bar in the sky and forcing the world to try to keep up.

For much of the early years of the Williams story, the younger sister was an afterthought. Venus had entered the storm first, validating the endless hype in her debut at 14 years old, nearly beating Arantxa Sánchez Vicario. A year later, Serena's career began with a relative whimper, a 1-6, 1-6 dismantling in the first qualifying round of the Canadian Open. When Richard Wil-



▲ Serena Williams (right) is congratulated by sister Venus following their singles third round match at the 2018 US Open. Photograph: Julian Finney/Getty Images

liams warned that Serena would be even better, few listened.

While Venus always drew power from her height, Serena took time to fill out her frame, which would play a defining role in her growth. In lieu of Venus's range, she learned how to drag opponents off the court with sharp angles, to smartly construct attacking points and, when all else failed, to hustle until the end. In 1999, aged 17, she truly began to harness her power, which combined with her nous for destructive consequences.

She ended a remarkable breakthrough year with an all-time great series of wins at the 1999 US Open: Clijsters, Wimbledon champion Conchita Martínez, world No 4 Monica Seles, No 2-ranked Lindsay Davenport, Martina Hingis, the No 1. Four of the five matches were decided in three brutal sets, yet at the end of the week Williams stood as a grand slam champion. "Five hall of famers," says Pam Shriver, a hall of fame player herself. "You look at who she beat. It was unbelievable."

Dominance did not immediately follow. It was Venus who began to rack up major titles first, winning four of six grand slam titles across 2000 and 2001. Then Serena simply rose above her sister's top level. By 2003, she was one of the greatest movers of all time and one of the most destructive ball-strikers. Her serve was smooth, reliable and vicious. As she and Venus also rolled through doubles titles, she had

developed a complete game. "It almost seemed like they were playing a different sport," says Carillo.

The impact of the Williams sisters is best reflected in the fleeting challenges of their rivals. The late 90s had been a period of transition in the final years of Steffi Graf, with a group of dynamic, brash and charismatic young talents initially headed by Hingis, a genius on the court but whose delicate guile was increasingly inefficient in their presence. The Williams dominance, along with the forceful shot-making of Davenport and Jennifer Capriati, slammed her window of opportunity shut. By 2002, as Venus and Serena played in four consecutive grand slam finals, she was done.

"When the bar is raised that high, in that much of a hurry, it's gonna be a hard thing to adjust to," says Carillo. "You play your whole young life playing one way and now all of a sudden there are two players saying: 'OK, you're really good, I know you've been doing this your whole life but get a load of this: What are you supposed to do? Change your grips? Hit more of an open stance?'"

Karolina Pliskova, 30, is one of the few current top players today old enough to have seen the Williams sisters during the early days. She and her twin sister, Kristyna, saw in them the attacking style of play they wished to execute. "Before them tennis was completely different," Karolina says.

As some fell away during the first wave of Williams dominance, others adapted. Clijsters was already a supreme athlete while Justine Henin emerged in 2003 with added muscle. Under the right circumstances, Henin found joy in blunting Serena's power with her variety and countering with her own weapons. But while the Williams sisters lasted for more than 25 years, the challenge of keeping up burned her out. By 2008, both Henin and Clijsters had announced their first retirements.

"There were so many rivalries that she could've had," says Shriver. "It wasn't her fault. Nobody stepped up the way she stepped up time and time again. People say she didn't have the Chris [Evert] and Martina [Navratilova] rivalry. You can only play who's there. Think of all the champions she saw off, starting with Graf, Hingis, Clijsters, Henin, Capriati, Davenport."

The Williams sisters had entered the sport at a time guile and patience were core features of most players, groundstrokes unwound with elaborate, inefficient motions incapable of dealing with such pace. They did not invent the power game - Seles, Capriati, Davenport and Mary Pierce preceded them - but their athleticism and serving took it to unimaginable places. Their influence was reflected in those who followed, such as the emergence of Maria Sharapova, who studied them in her youth and mimicked their attacking mindsets, but without the athleticism or nous to measure up.

As essential as it was in the history of women's tennis, that first peak of Serena's was short-lived in the context of her 27-year career. By the end of 2003, she had undergone knee surgery and then her world was rocked by the killing of her sister, Yetunde. Her following years would be marked by inactivity, depression and her plummeting ranking, a fall that set the stage for one of her numerous legendary comebacks as she won the 2007 Australian Open.

As her career lengthened and she moved further from her athletic peak, Serena's all-time great serve became an even more central part of her game.



▲ Serena Williams (left) and her sister Venus attempt to return the same ball to Ai Sugiyama of Japan and Daniela Hantuchova of Slovakia during the women's doubles final at the Australian Open in 2009. Photograph: Mark Baker/AP

"Technically, it was perfect," says Carillo. "It was divine. Her toss never varied. It just never changed so you couldn't read it well. Her serve wide to the deuce court is, I think, my favourite serve of all time."

Shriver was one of the great servers of her own time, and she believes that Serena's serve has been transformative for the entire game. "I think that more people realised in the women's game that the serve needed to be a weapon," Shriver says. "I think that's one of her legacies. I do feel like the serve in women's tennis in the last 10 years has been appreciated more and worked on more."

Serena's legacy was not only defined by her game. At the US Open, a brief look at the number of black fans and people of colour present underlines how their success has affected who watches, participates and claims it as their own. "When you walk around the grounds now versus 25 years ago, it looks totally different," says Shriver. "The appeal to bring in people of colour. I don't think Arthur [Ashe] had this kind of impact. Obviously Althea [Gibson] didn't. They've really changed who comes to watch tennis and who plays. That's a big legacy right there."

And also who plays it at the highest level. Before the Williams sisters, Evonne Goolagong and Zina Garrison were the only black women to reach grand slam finals in the Open era. In the past five years alone, Madison Keys, Sloane Stephens, Naomi Osaka and Coco Gauff have all achieved that distinction. Years after this grand farewell is complete, more will follow.

Westwood accuses PGA Tour of copying Saudi Arabia-backed LIV Golf series

Reuters

Sweeping changes that the PGA Tour announced this week are "a copy" of the Saudi Arabia-backed LIV Golf series, the former world No 1 Lee Westwood said.

On Wednesday, the PGA Tour commissioner, Jay Monahan, announced the tour's top golfers had committed to competing against each other more regularly. The changes require top golfers, assuming they qualify, to play at least a 20-event schedule consisting of the four majors, the Players Championship, 12 "elevated events" with av-



▲ Lee Westwood is suspended from the PGA Tour after competing at the opening LIV Golf events. Photograph: Chris Trotman/LIV Golf/via Getty Images

erage purses of \$20m (£16.8m) and at least three other PGA Tour events of the player's choosing.

Monahan said the changes were inspired by the PGA Tour members and

singled out those who held a players-only meeting last week to discuss a number of proposals in the face of the LIV Golf threat.

"I laugh at what the PGA Tour players have come up with," Westwood, who was suspended from the PGA Tour after playing in LIV's inaugural event in London, told Golf Digest.

"It's just a copy of what LIV is doing. There are a lot of hypocrites out there. They all say LIV is 'not competitive'. They all point at the no-cut aspect of LIV and the short fields. Now, funnily enough, they are proposing 20 events that look a lot like LIV ... and hopefully, they will be held to account as we were

in the early days"

The PGA Tour and Europe's DP World Tour have put up a united front in their stand against LIV and in June announced a strengthening of their alliance to combat the threat. However, Westwood added he was not convinced by the strategic alliance, saying the PGA Tour's prize purses had lured golfers away from Europe in the past.

"All the PGA Tour has done since Tiger [Woods] came on tour is up the prize purses," Westwood said. "In turn, that has taken all the best players from Europe away from the European Tour. They've had to play in the States, taking all their world ranking points

with them."

Meanwhile, in the PGA's season-ending Tour Championship, England's Matt Fitzpatrick finished the first round six shots off world No 1 Scottie Scheffler's lead of 15 under at East Lake, Atlanta. The British player, who won his first major at the 2022 US Open, started on three under and shot an impressive six-under-par 64 to finish the day in third place. Rory McIlroy dropped four shots in his first two holes but bounced back to finish the day on seven under.

Scheffler took advantage of his 10-under start which was awarded for

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his accumulated points on the PGA Tour, and was at the top of the stand-

ings when the first round kicked off on Thursday. Players start the Georgia event with their shot advantages deter- mined by their place in the FedEx Cup

standings.

McIlroy started the day on four under and, after immediately giving up his advantage, got back on track thanks

to five birdies in his final seven holes. The Open champion, Cameron Smith, playing for the first time since the open- ing FedEx Cup playoffs event due to a

hip injury, still managed a 67 and joined McIlroy at eight shots back.

Oneil Cruz is 6ft 7in and can blast a baseball 122mph. But can he play?

Hunter Felt

On Wednesday, Pittsburgh Pirates shortstop Oneil Cruz did something we’ve never seen an MLB player do before. Well, not that we know about, seeing as the StatCast era didn’t begin until 2015. Against the Atlanta Braves, Cruz cracked a base hit that clocked at 122.4mph off the bat, which surpassed New York Yankees slugger Giancarlo Stanton’s previous record of 122.2mph.

It was an impressive “exit” velocity, even if Cruz’s record-setting hit only went for a single in PNC Park. He may have hit it too hard to get a double out of it, though it would have been a home run in most ballparks. Still, it might have been the highlight for hometown fans who watched their team get blown by the Braves, not a shocking result for a Pittsburgh team trapped in the cellar of the NL Central.

Cruz’s rookie season has been rather rocky as well. Yes, the 6ft 7in infielder has ridiculous tools: his 97.8mph throw to first base earlier in the season was also a StatCast-era record. The 23-year-old managed to complete both feats in 54 games, but during that stretch he only hit .199/.249/.398. When he’s made contact, Cruz has hit the ball far but his 10 home runs during that period went along with 79 strikeouts and just 13 walks. Clearly, plate patience is a concern.

Now, Pirates fans hope that this is simply because the Dominican prospect is still adjusting to life in the major leagues. Cruz, after all, only played two games at baseball’s highest level last



▲ Oneil Cruz has made some impressive firsts during his short major league career. Photograph: Philip G Pavely/AP

year and still managed to squeeze in his first MLB home run. He wasn’t called up again until June of this year, which caused fans to accuse the team of manipulating his service time, particularly as they were struggling to get production from the shortstop position.

Were the Pirates attempting to delay the start of Cruz’s free agency period by keeping him in AAA? Almost certainly! Was it necessarily the wrong decision for Cruz’s development? Perhaps not! The early results suggest that he’s not quite ready to be a full-time starter.

Despite Cruz’s obvious power, the

remarkable arm and his speed on the basepaths (with six stolen bases so far), it’s looking like he needs work in the two most important aspects of the game as a hitter: making consistent contact and getting on base. Considering his body type, it’s also not certain if his defensive future will be at shortstop or the outfield. Cruz is clearly talented, but he’s still what they call a project.

Not all MLB projects are successful. The league is littered with talented hitting prospects with obvious tools who never stuck in the majors. Take, for instance, the saga of Wily Mo Peña, the outfielder who likely had more

raw power than any of his contemporaries. His tape-measure home runs were enough to keep teams interested in him, but his eye-popping propensity to strike out ensured that he never stayed in one place for too long as anything other than a fourth outfielder.

An impressive arm isn’t even enough to keep a starting pitcher in the majors. Forget StatCast, career minor leaguer Steve Dalkowski’s career washed out in 1966, meaning that his legendary fastball was only clocked by a radar gun once (to disappointing results). This means that no evidence exists to prove that his offerings ever hit the 110mph mark (for comparison,

the current record is Aldois Chapman’s 105.8 mph fastball thrown in 2010). However hard Dalkowski threw, a complete lack of control ensured that he never made an MLB roster and his last- ing claim to fame ended up being that his story eventually inspired that of Tim Robbins’s Nuke LaLoosh in the film Bull Durham.

Neither of these players quite work as direct comparisons to Cruz, who has more than a single tool to fall back on. What’s Cruz’s comparison if he does succeed? He doesn’t project to be an all-around player like the Los Angeles Angels’ Mike Trout, no matter how much his basic skills improve. Maybe Stanton himself is a more suitable parallel, although he’s no infielder.

Longtime Pirates writer John Perrotto asked scouts for the player he could become and the clearest answer came from an anonymous employee from an American League team. “I know this might be a stretch, but I’d say Darryl Strawberry playing shortstop,” the scout was quoted as saying. “It’s the only thing I can think of.” We might, it seems, be in uncharted territory here. Cruz’s best-case scenario might not be the Next Stanton or Next Trout, but the debut of a whole new type of ballplayer.

Whether or not Cruz can fulfill his potential won’t be based on him continuing to dazzle with StatCast numbers: even his record-breaking hit only went for a single base. Those are just indicators of his clearly impressive skill set. What the Pirates (and MLB) need to see now is whether Cruz can put it all together. If so he may just be baseball’s next star.

Nick Kyrgios pitted against good friend Thanasi Kokkinakis in US Open first round

Australian Associated Press

Nick Kyrgios has been handed a heart- pulling first-round encounter at the US Open, drawn against his great friend Thanasi Kokkinakis in an all-Australian blockbuster. And in a Flushing Meadows men’s field without Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal will open his bid for a 23rd grand slam title against Australian wildcard Rinky Hijikata when the main draw kicks off next week.

Kyrgios and Kokkinakis – the “Special Ks” when they play together as a doubles team – have been pitted against each other in a tough quarter, which also features Russia’s No 1 seed and defending champion Daniil Medvedev.

The Australian Open-winning pair, who will be also be seeking a third title of the year together in the men’s



▲ Australian doubles partners Thanasi Kokkinakis and Nick Kyrgios will meet in the US Open first round. Photograph: Kevin C Cox/Getty Images

doubles, have never played against each on the main tour, though Kyrgios did win their two lower-level encounters when they were up-and-coming

teens.

The No 23 seed Kyrgios, one of the favourites for the title after his run to the Wimbledon final and subsequent

victory in Washington, has a minefield draw.

If he beats Kokkinakis, he will likely play dangerous French left-hander Ugo Humbert in the second round and Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut, the No 16 seed in the third, before a possible match-up with Medvedev.

But the whole men’s field will feel their chances have been lifted by the absence of Djokovic, who announced on social media less than two hours before the behind-closed-doors draw that he would not be coming to New York.

So Hijikata, the 21-year-old prospect from Sydney who has been handed a wildcard as part of US tennis’s reciprocal arrangement with their Australian counterparts, has a dream – or potentially nightmarish – encounter with No 2 seed and four-time champion

Nadal.

Alex de Minaur, the Australian No 1 and No 18 seed, will open against Serbian Filip Krajinovic. And there is another all-Australian clash first up with James Duckworth meeting his fellow Sydneysider Chris O’Connell, while the in-form Jason Kubler will aim to continue his breakthrough year by beating Sweden’s Mikael Ymer.

In the women’s draw, Australia’s in-form No 1 Ajla Tomljanovic will face the Czech Republic’s Karolina Muchova in her first match, and, if she got past a likely second-round opponent Martina Trevisan, could possibly meet Williams in the last 32.

The Australian No 2 Daria Saville will take on Romania’s Elena-Gabriela Ruse in her opening match, while Jaimee Fourlis, also handed a wildcard, will play a qualifier yet to be decided.

Trump’s New York City golf course to host Saudi-backed women’s event

Agencies

A New York City-owned golf course managed by former US president Donald Trump’s business is expected to host a Saudi Arabia-supported women’s tournament in October, city officials said Friday.

The plan to host the Aramco Team Series at the Trump Golf Links at Ferry Point in the Bronx comes after New York City’s attempt to cancel Trump’s contract to run the course was thrown out by a judge in April.

Former mayor Bill de Blasio said shortly after Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol on 6 January 2021, that he was canceling Trump’s contracts to run the golf course and several Central Park concessions. The Democratic mayor said the city had the legal right terminate a contract with a company whose leaders are engaged in criminal activity such as inciting an insurrection.

Manhattan state court judge Debra James ruled that city’s claim that the



▲ The Aramco Team Series is coming to the Trump Golf Links, a New York City-owned golf course which is managed by former US president Donald Trump’s business. Photograph: John Minchillo/AP

Trump Organization had breached the contracts lacked any legal foundation.

The Aramco Team Series, first played in 2020 as the Saudi Ladies

Team International, is financed by Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund.

The Saudi fund is also backing the LIV Golf tour, set up as a rival to the PGA Tour, which played a tournament at Trump’s Bedminster, New Jersey course last month.

Some family members of September 11 victims who blame Saudi Arabia for the 2001 terror attacks criticized Trump for hosting the Saudi-backed tour.

The Saudi government has denied any involvement in the attacks.

Messages seeking comment about Aramco’s 13-15 October tournament in New York City were sent to the Trump Organization and the Aramco Team Series.

Nick Paolucci, a spokesperson for the city law department, said, “As the decision in the previous administration’s court case displayed, contractually, the city is obligated to follow the terms of the Trump Ferry license agreement and cannot unreasonably withhold approval of this tournament.”

Klopp’s Liverpool: is time catching up with this magnificent red machine?

Jonathan Liew

When it was all getting a little too much for Jürgen Klopp at Mainz, when the defeats began to accumulate and the negative thoughts began to spiral, he would clear the schedule, jump in the car and take his squad on an adventure holiday. Long walks in the Hunsrück. Mountain biking in the Black Forest. Two or three days spent knocking back beers, sleeping in tiny huts, having the sort of honest conversations you couldn’t really have in an office. This was Klopp’s terrain, the land where he grew up, and in times of crisis it also became his sanctuary.

For Klopp’s players, the occasional jolting change of scenery became not simply invigorating but desperately necessary. The training drills would frequently change, but the rasping cigarette-hardened voice delivering them never did. The limbs and the lungs would be worked to exhaustion from July until May. With every passing year you could feel yourself getting stronger, fitter, harder, tighter. The football was thrilling and relentless. The camaraderie was bracing and intense. Everything worked and worked and worked, right up until the moment it stopped working.

“That’s your ball! That’s your ball! You go fucking out to him!” James Milner screamed at Virgil van Dijk at Old Trafford on Monday night. As Manchester United celebrated Jadon Sancho’s first-half goal, Liverpool were beginning their inquest into a defence that had quite literally stopped working. Trent Alexander-Arnold simply stopped chasing Anthony Elanga. Joe Gomez was nutmegged. Milner dived in



▲ Jürgen Klopp’s season has seen his squad hit by a succession of injuries and only two points yielded from a possible nine in the league. Photograph: John Powell/Liverpool FC/Getty Images

on Sancho with all the elan of a fire-fighter turning up at a christening.

Finally came Van Dijk who, given the chance to close down the six yards separating him and Sancho, simply stood stock still, arms behind his back like a frightened hostage. In which context, that furious exchange between the 36-year-old Milner and the 31-year-old Van Dijk felt like a quietly seminal moment in the trajectory of this Liverpool team under Klopp: a magnificent fighting machine with whom time may just be catching up.

This is not so much a reflection on results but on mood. Yes, results this season – as in, the three of them that exist – have been underwhelming, but it’s possible to offer up mitigation for all of them. Fulham: an early kick-off, a promoted team and a sleepy start. Crystal Palace, a red card and a packet of missed chances. Losing 2-1 at Old Trafford: the sort of freakish one-off result that often occurs in local derbies. Liverpool enjoy home fixtures against Bour-

nemouth and Newcastle on Saturday and Wednesday and it would be entirely unsurprising if they went on a 10-match winning streak from here.

But in any case the broader picture would remain unmistakable: a team that have never felt more sorely in need of a refresh, a reboot, perhaps even some respite and an injection of simple joy. This is a club that has spent the last three or four years operating at the very outer limit of its capabilities: athletically, financially, emotionally. And it has done so with the same man and the same voice, virtually the same players operating at the same intensity, the same challenge and the same challengers, a far richer opponent with a far greater margin for error. This was always going to be a product with a limited shelf life. The only real question is how much.

There is a temptation to see the current travails at Anfield as part of the natural life cycle of a Klopp team: an extension of the Béla Guttmann curse

that seems to afflict all Klopp sides after five or six years. In Klopp’s seventh season at Mainz they were relegated from the Bundesliga after a stirring period of ascent. In Klopp’s seventh season at Borussia Dortmund there was a dramatic collapse that left them in the relegation zone at Christmas and eventually precipitated his departure from the club where he won two consecutive titles.

Both times Klopp tried to struggle on, continued to insist – often in curt and cantankerous tones – that better times were just around the corner. And in a way, Klopp’s demeanour is the big tell here, a man whose drawn features and basic air of world-weariness feel jarringly at odds with the sunny, bouncy coach who walked in through the door seven years and a lifetime ago. Here he is, rounding on critics of Darwin Núñez. Here he is, grumbling about United’s time-wasting. Here he is, driving home and getting unnaturally angry at Gabriel Agbonlahor on TalkSport. For Klopp to be in this frame of mind after seven years in the job is perhaps understandable. For it to happen in August feels faintly alarming.

The closest parallel here is with Dortmund’s 2014-15 campaign, where a poor start, a World Cup-truncated pre-season, the departure of a star forward (Robert Lewandowski) and an autumn injury crisis sent Klopp’s side into a tailspin from which they could not extricate themselves. “Our football makes no sense,” Klopp moaned after a meek 2-1 defeat at Köln, and yet even as Dortmund went into freefall there was still little appetite for a change. After all, Klopp had enthusiastically signed a contract extension only the previous season. There were new forwards such



▲ James Milner is furious with Virgil van Dijk after Manchester United’s opening goal on Monday. Photograph: Michael Regan/Getty Images

as Ciro Immobile and Adrián Ramos who needed time to bed in. The footballing message remained the same. In retrospect, perhaps this became part of the problem.

No team as good as Liverpool can ever be truly “worked out”. What has changed is form and execution, confidence and sharpness, the little one-percenters that make all the difference when you are playing a high-energy, high-wire style of football. And the early evidence of this season suggests that on the simple measures of running, challenging and creating, Liverpool have sharply regressed. Not only that, but in many cases these are an acceleration of trends that were already becoming evident last season.

Pressures in the final third have dropped from 45 to 36. Carries into the final third have dropped from 18 to 12. Even fouls – a measure of the aggression and prejudice with which Liverpool sought to stop you playing – have dropped 25% from last season. And yet Liverpool are seeing more of the ball: 70%, compared with 62-63% in each of the last four seasons. All over the pitch, and indeed off it, Liverpool have traded safety for risk, entrenchment for

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engagement, conservatism for enterprise. Much has been made of the fact that Liverpool have barely made a mis-step in the transfer market over the last

few seasons. Which is a lot easier, of course, for as long as your strategy is so rigid and risk-averse that you barely make a step at all.

Perhaps the story of this Liverpool team is one that hit unimaginable

peaks but has since failed to move forward, that haven't really had the time to move forward, that haven't had the time to do very much at all except keep the engine running, keep the lights on, keep turning up every three days. Were

this a smaller or a bigger club, Klopp might have had greater scope for reinvention: time to implement new ideas, time (and money) to refresh the squad, perhaps simply time to whisk everyone off to some gladed idyll and shoot the

breeze in front of a roaring campfire. But here and now, this is all there is: a puffing red engine operating at the very limits of its capacity.

FIA sticks to guns on F1 ‘bouncing’ rule change despite top teams’ objections

Giles Richards in Spa-Francorchamps

The mathematics may appear impenetrable but Formula One's purpose in imposing a new rule mid-season could not be more clear. This weekend at the Belgian Grand Prix the FIA has explicitly shown it will not tolerate a risk of long-term head trauma to its drivers.

Its decision has not been popular with some teams as the knock-on from what was imposed for safety reasons may yet also have an effect on the competitive order. The results will be seen this weekend at Spa-Francorchamps but should not detract from what has been a steadfast commitment to put driver safety first.

The issue that has dominated the season is that of cars “porpoising” and bouncing on the track under the new regulations. With the cars using ground effect for downforce and running as low to the ground as possible with very stiff setups, two fundamental problems emerged. Porpoising is a violent, vertical jarring caused by a stall in the aerodynamics; the similar but different issue of bouncing is caused by the low ride heights smashing the car into the ground over uneven track surfaces.

The porpoising has been largely eliminated but the bouncing remains and drivers spoke out, fearing for the potential ill effects on health. After a



▲ Lewis Hamilton in action during the first free practice session at Spa. The Mercedes car has been affected by bouncing and porpoising. Photograph: Christian Bruna/EPA

particularly brutal weekend at Baku some insisted the problem could not be allowed to continue.

The FIA reacted with two parts of a new technical directive which come into play this weekend. The first is the use of an “oscillation metric”, an algorithm that measures the jarring and sets a threshold beyond which teams cannot go. The second is a tightening of the rules on the rigidity of the floor, to prevent ride heights that are too low.

Both Ferrari and Red Bull are believed to have been exploiting a loophole in the rules that allowed an element of flexibility in their floor, while Mercedes did not. Levelling this playing field may peg the leaders back a little.

Red Bull and Ferrari, of course, ob-

jected but the FIA has stuck to its guns. Nikolas Tombazis is the FIA's poacher-turned-gamekeeper leading their efforts. The Greek worked with Benetton, McLaren and Ferrari as an aerodynamicist and is now the head of the FIA's single-seater technical department. He has been unequivocal in Belgium as to how imperative the rule change was.

“There are short-term effects, situations like we had in Baku, that cannot be repeated but there are also long-term effects,” he said. “We have had quite a lot of sports that have ignored alarm bells ringing and have paid very dearly. We did not want to be in such a position. Our concern was high and we discussed it with medical experts.”

The Mercedes team principal, Toto Wolff, read the conclusions of the FIA's medical reports, which he insisted laid out the situation starkly. “The FIA commissioned medical work on the porpoising,” he said. “The summary of the doctors is that a frequency of 1-2Hz, sustained over a few minutes, can lead to brain damage. We have 6-7Hz over several hours.”

The FIA's metric is designed to limit the potential for that damage but, much as it looks like a fiendishly complex piece of maths, its implementation is relatively straightforward. The cars are fitted with an accelerometer which registers all vertical impacts over 3G, indicating the car has heavy oscillation or that it has hit the ground. In the equation the force is converted into a value of energy and sets the limit of the energy that cannot be exceeded for every 100km.

Objections were expected as Tombazis admits but, given it was a safety issue, the agreement of the teams was not required and doing nothing was not an option the FIA was willing to consider. If its efforts have indeed finally put paid to the issues, the sport will move on to the next technical battleground having seen off a genuine danger with some swiftly applied science.

“It would have been a surprise if they had not made objections,” said Tombazis. “F1 is extremely competitive



▲ Charles Leclerc and Max Verstappen will start in Belgium from the back of the grid. Photograph: Dan Mullan/Getty Images

by nature, everything that is passed as a regulation is always naturally first judged by: ‘Does it benefit us more than it benefits them?’ But we can't just not do something because somebody will criticise us.”

The title rivals Max Verstappen and Charles Leclerc will start the race from the rear end of the grid after taking power unit parts beyond their allocation. Six drivers in total have full grid penalties and been relegated to the back; their final starting positions will be decided by their places in qualifying.

On the track in practice Carlos Sainz was quickest for Ferrari in a rain-interrupted first hour. In the second session Verstappen showed immense pace to top the timesheets. The Red Bull driver was a full eight-tenths up on Ferrari's Leclerc in second. Hamilton and Russell were sixth and eighth for Mercedes, struggling to warm up their tyres in the cool temperatures.

Premier League team news: predicted lineups for the weekend action

Graham Searles

Arsenal v Fulham

Saturday 5.30pm *Sky Sports Premier League* Venue Emirates Stadium Last season n/a
Referee Jarred Gillett This season G2 Y6 Ro 3 cards/game
Odds H 4-11 A 19-2 D 5-1
Arsenal
Subs from Turner, Bellerín, Tierney, Smith Rowe, Nketiah, Maitland-Niles, Holding, Soares, Tomiyasu, Vieira, Sami Lokonga, Elneny, Marquinhos
Doubtful None
Injured Nelson (knock, unknown)
Suspended None
Discipline Y4 Ro
Form WWW
Leading scorers Jesus, Martinelli, Ødegaard 2
Fulham
Subs from Gazzaniga, Leno, Duffy, Cairney, Chalobah, Muniz, Bryan, Mbabu, Diop, Francois, Kebano
Doubtful Kebano (groin)



▲ Emi Buendía evades Matty Cash in an Aston Villa training session. Photograph: Aston Villa/Getty Images

Injured Wilson (knee, Oct), Solomon (knee, unknown)
Suspended None
Discipline Y8 Ro
Form DDW
Leading scorer Mitrovic 3
Aston Villa v West Ham
Sunday 2pm Venue Villa Park Last season Aston Villa 1 West Ham 4

Referee David Coote This season G1 Y3 Ro 3 cards/game
Odds H 4-3 A 40-17 D 5-2
Aston Villa
Subs from Olsen, Steer, Douglas Luiz, Sanson, Buendía, Traoré, Chambers, Hause, Augustinsson, Young, Nankamba, Hause, Bailey, Archer, Iroegbunam, El Ghazi, Guilbert

Doubtful Augustinsson (knee)
Injured Diego Carlos (achilles, unknown)
Suspended None
Discipline Y8 Ro
Form LWL
Leading scorers Buendía, Ings, Watkins 1
West Ham
Subs from Areola, Randolph, Trott, Ashby, Johnson, Dawson, Ogbonna, Baptiste, Downes, Coventry, Lanzini, Oko-Flex, Scamacca, Cornet, Emerson
Doubtful Dawson (hamstring), Coufal (concussion)
Injured Aguero (anke, Oct)
Suspended None
Discipline Y3 Ro
Form LLL
Leading scorer n/a
Brentford v Everton
Saturday 3pm Venue Brentford Community Stadium Last season Brentford 1 Everton 0
Referee John Brooks This season G1 Y6 Ro 6 cards/game
Odds H Evens A 3-1 D 13-5



▲ Probable starters in bold, contenders in light

Brentford
Subs from Cox, Strakosha, Goode, Ghoddos, Onyeka, Dervisoglu, Lewis-Potter, Damsgaard, Baptiste, Janelt, Sørensen, Stevens, Roerselv
Doubtful Roerslev (ankle), Lewis-

Continued from page 51

Potter (knock)
Injured Canós (hamstring, 3 Sep),
Ajer (hamstring, 3 Sep), Pinnock (knee, unknown)
Suspended None
Discipline Y2 R0
Form DWL
Leading scorers Dasilva, Toney 2
Everton
Subs from Begovic, Lonerган, Coleman, Keane, Nkounkou, Vinagre, Allan, Davies, McNeil, Warrington, Welch, Mills
Doubtful Davies (groin)
Injured Doucouré (hamstring, 11 Sep), Calvert-Lewin (knee, 11 Sep), Gomes (match fitness, Sep), Mina (ankle, Oct), Godfrey (leg, Dec), Townsend (knee, Jan)
Suspended None
Discipline Y7 R0
Form LLD
Leading scorer Gray 1
Brighton v Leeds
Saturday 3pm Venue Amex Stadium Last season Brighton 0 Leeds 0
Referee Michael Salisbury This season G1 Y5 R0 5 cards/game
Odds H 10-11 A 17-5 D 6-4
Brighton
Subs from McGill, Steele, Lamp- tey, Colwill, Mwepu, Alzate, Enciso, Undav, Mitoma, Kozłowski, Ferguson, Van Hecke, Estupiñán, Andone
Doubtful None
Injured Sarmiento (knee, 4 Sep), Moder (knee, Feb)
Suspended None
Discipline Y3 R0
Form WDW
Leading scorer Gross 2
Leeds
Subs from Klaesson, Cooper, Klich, Bamford, Drameh, Gelhardt, Summer- ville, Greenwood, Forshaw, Sinisterra, Hjelde
Doubtful Bamford (groin)
Injured Ayling (knee, 3 Sep), Firpo

Sport

(knee, 3 Sep), Dallas (leg, Jan)
Suspended None
Discipline Y5 R0
Form WDW
Leading scorer Rodrigo 4
Chelsea v Leicester
Saturday 3pm Venue Stamford Bridge Last season Chelsea 1 Leicester 1
Referee Paul Tierney This season G2 Y11 R1 6 cards/game
Odds H 4-9 A 15-2 D 4-1
Chelsea
Subs from Arrizabalaga, Bettinelli, Chalobah, Chukwuemeka, Ziyech, Pu- lisic, Vale, Hudson-Odoi, Broja, Casadei
Doubtful Broja (knock), Pulisic (achilles)
Injured Kanté (18 Sep), Kovacic (knee, unknown)
Suspended Koulibaly (one match)
Discipline Y7 R1
Form WDL
Leading scorers James, Jorginho, Koulibaly 1
Leicester
Subs from Iversen, Smithies, Albrighton, Iheanacho, Pérez, Daka, Vestergaard, Mendy, Praet, Thomas, Soyuncu
Doubtful Maddison (knock)
Injured Bertrand (knee, 17 Sep), Pe- reira (achilles, Feb)
Unavailable Fofana (personal), Sou- maré (personal)
Suspended None
Discipline Y3 R0
Form DLL
Leading scorer Maddison 2
Liverpool v Bournemouth
Saturday 3pm Venue Anfield Last season n/a
Referee Stuart Attwell This season G2 Y5 R1 3 cards/game
Odds H 1-8 A 28-1 D 10-1
Liverpool
Subs from Adrián, Davies, Tsimikas, Phillips, Bajcetic, Van den Berg, Milner, Carvalho, Clark, Keïta
Doubtful None
Injured Jones (calf, 3 Sep), Kel-

leher (groin, 3 Sep), Jota (thigh, 10 Sep), Matip (groin, 10 Sep), Thiago (hamstring, 18 Sep), Konaté (knee, 24 Sep), Oxlade-Chamberlain (hamstring, unknown), Ramsay (knock, unknown)
Suspended Núñez (second of three)
Discipline Y3 R1
Form DDL
Leading scorer Salah 2
Bournemouth
Subs from Dennis, Neto, Marcondes, Lowe, Stanislas, Dembélé, Hill, Senesi, Billing, Saydee, Christie, Pearson, So- lanke, Stacey
Doubtful Solanke (ankle), Lowe (ill- ness)
Injured Fredericks (calf, 3 Sep), Rothwell (thigh, 10 Sep), Brooks (match fitness, Oct), Stanislas (groin, unknown)
Suspended None
Discipline Y8 R0
Form WLL
Leading scorers Lerma, Moore 1
Manchester City v Crystal Palace
Saturday 3pm Venue Etihad Sta- dium Last season Manchester City 0 Crystal Palace 2
Referee Graham Scott This season G1 Y5 R0 5 cards/game
Odds H 1-5 A 17-1 D 7-1
Manchester City
Subs from Moreno, Carson, Aké, Palmer, Gündogan, Álvarez, Mbete, Wilson-Ebrand, Stones, Lewis, Palmer, Phillips, Grealish
Doubtful Grealish, Mbete, Phillips, Aké (all match fitness)
Injured Laporte (knee, 10 Sep)
Suspended None
Discipline Y3 R0
Form WWD
Leading scorer Haaland 3
Crystal Palace
Subs from Johnstone, Milivojevic, Olise, Mateta, Hughes, Édouard, Ebio- wei, Richards, Riedewald
Doubtful None
Injured McArthur (groin, 30 Aug), Butland (wrist, 11 Sep), Ferguson (ankle, Dec), Tomkins (calf, unknown)

Suspended None
Discipline Y7 R0
Form LDW
Leading scorer Zaha 3
Nottingham Forest v Tottenham
Sunday 4.30pm *Sky Sports Premier League* Venue City Ground Last season n/a
Referee Craig Pawson This season G2 Y8 R0 4 cards/game
Odds H 13-2 A 1-2 D 4-1
Nottingham Forest
Subs from Hennessey, Shelvey, Smith, Biancone, Gibbs-White, Soh, Sur- ridge, Mighten, Cafú, Kouyaté, Yates, Freuler, Dennis, Taylor, Konaté, Colback
Doubtful Colback (illness)
Injured Richards (calf, Oct), Niak- hatee (hamstring, Oct)
Suspended None
Discipline Y10 R0
Form LWD
Leading scorers Awoniyi, Johnson 1
Tottenham
Subs from Austin, Forster, Doherty, Reguilón, Winks, Richarlison, Gil, Ses- segnon, Spence, Moura, Sarr, Lenglet, Bissouma, White
Doubtful None
Injured Skipp (calf, 3 Sep), Romero (groin, 3 Sep)
Suspended None
Discipline Y5 R0
Form WDW
Leading scorer Kane 2
Southampton v Manchester United
Saturday 12.30pm *BT Sport 1* Venue St Mary's Stadium Last season Sou- thampton 1 Manchester United 1
Referee Andy Madley This season G2 Y5 R0 2.5 cards/game
Odds H 17-5 A Evens D 3-1
Southampton
Subs from Caballero, Lis, McCar- thy, Lyanco, Stephens, Romeu, Per- raud, Mara, Diallo, Simeu, Valery, S Armstrong, Bednarek
Doubtful Perraud (groin)
Injured Livramento (knee, Jan)

Suspended None
Discipline Y4 R0
Form LDW
Leading scorer Adams 2
Manchester United
Subs from Heaton, Wan-Bissaka, Shaw, Maguire, Garner, Van de Beek, Hannibal, Garnacho, Fred, Ronaldo, Casemiro, Lindelöf
Doubtful None
Injured Pellestri (ankle, Oct), Mar- tial (achilles, unknown)
Suspended None
Discipline Y11 R0
Form LLW
Leading scorers Rashford, Sancho 1
Wolves v Newcastle
Sunday 2pm *Sky Sports Premier League* Venue Molineux Last season Wolves 2 Newcastle 1
Referee Peter Bankes This season G2 Y11 R0 5.5 cards/game
Odds H 7-4 A 9-5 D 23-10
Wolves
Subs from Sarkic, Søndergaard, Jordão, Mosquera, Boly, Semedo, Toti, Ronan, Traoré, Cundle, Jiménez, Hwang, Dendoncker
Doubtful Boly (knock)
Injured Chiquinho (knee, Apr)
Suspended None
Discipline Y4 R0
Form LDL
Leading scorer Podence 1
Newcastle
Subs from Darlow, Lascelles, Burn, Fernández, Dummett, Isak, Murphy, Ritchie, Fraser, Anderson, Longstaff
Doubtful Burn (Head)
Injured Wilson (hamstring, 11 Sep), Shelvey (thigh, Nov), Krafth (knee, un- known)
Suspended None
Discipline Y7 R0
Form WDD
Leading scorer Wilson 2

Bills’ Matt Araiza accused of gang-raping teenager while at San Diego State

Associated Press

Matt Araiza, the ‘Punt God’ who led San Diego State to a record-setting season before being drafted by the Buffalo Bills, and two of his former Aztecs teammates were accused in a civil law- suit Thursday of gang-raping a teenager at an off-campus party last fall.

The lawsuit, filed in San Diego County superior court, accuses Araiza, Xavier Leonard and Nowlin ‘Pa’a’ Ewa- liko of gang-raping a then-17-year-old girl at a Halloween party at a home where Araiza had been living.

The plaintiff, now 18, is identified in the complaint as Jane Doe because she was underage at the time.

No arrests have been made and San Diego police have not publicly iden- tified any suspects.

Leonard is listed on San Diego State’s roster as a redshirt fresh- man offensive lineman from Arlington, Texas. Ewaliko is not listed on this year’s roster, but was on the 2021 roster as a defensive lineman from Seattle.

The lawsuit states that the teen had been drinking with friends when they decided to go to the party on 17 October



▲ Buffalo Bills punter Matt Araiza warms up during practice at the team’s training camp last month in Pittsford, New York. Photograph: Jeffrey T Barnes/AP

and she was “observably intoxicated upon arrival”. She became separated from her friends and was approached by Araiza who offered her a drink, ac- cording to the lawsuit. She believes

the drink “not only contained alcohol, but other intoxicating substances,” the complaint said.

She told Araiza, who was 21 at the time, that she was a high school senior,

according to the lawsuit. She alleges he then led her to a side yard where he asked her to perform oral sex and then had sex with her before taking her to a bedroom in the home. There

were at least three other men in the room, including Leonard and Ewaliko, according to the complaint. The lawsuit states that Araiza threw the teen onto the bed face first as she went in and out of consciousness while she was being raped. It added, “but she does remem- ber some moments from the horrific gang rape”.

After an hour and a half, the teen “stumbled out of the room bloody and crying”, according to the complaint. Her nose, belly button, and ear piercings had been pulled out.

She immediately told her friends about the rape and the next day re- ported it to police and underwent a rape exam, according to the lawsuit. Officers coached her on calling Araiza, which she did 10 days later as detec- tives recorded it, according to the com- plaint.

During the call, Araiza confirmed having sex with her, the lawsuit states, but when she asked him “And did we have actual sex?” he responded “This is Matt Araiza. I don’t remember anything that happened that night” and hung up.

“This was a horrific crime, the kind



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of which happens all too often,” attorney Dan Gilleon said in a statement to the AP. Gilleon said this case is especially egregious because it not only involved “self-entitled athletes”, but multiple organizations from the university to the Buffalo Bills “have acted the part of enablers looking the other way in denial that my client deserves justice even if the defendants are prized athletes”.

The Los Angeles Times first reported the lawsuit.

Attorney Kerry Armstrong, who

represents Araiza in the criminal investigation, called the allegations untrue based on the findings of an investigator he hired.

“I 100% do not believe that he ever forcibly raped this girl or had sex with her while she was passed out or drunk or anything like that,” Armstrong told the AP. “It’s unfortunate that she’s filed a civil suit. I think it’s a cash grab.”

Armstrong said the Bills were aware of the allegations and investigation of Araiza before the lawsuit was filed because he provided the team updates since he was retained by the punter about six weeks ago.

“Matt Araiza’s very upset about this, as you can imagine. He’s very disappointed,” Armstrong said. “But he’s going to get his day in court eventually.”

Armstrong said he’s been informed police have all but completed their criminal investigation, which will then be reviewed by the district attorney to determine whether to file charges.

Marc Xavier Carlos, who is representing Ewaliko in an ongoing criminal investigation, and Jamahl Kersey, representing Leonard, told the Times they could not comment.

The lawsuit comes days after the Bills cleared the way for Araiza to take

over the punting duties by releasing returning veteran Matt Haack. Buffalo drafted Araiza in the sixth round because of his booming left leg.

The 22-year-old Araiza, who attended San Diego’s Rancho Bernardo High, was SDSU’s most recognizable player during a school-record 12-2 season that netted a No 25 ranking in the final AP Top 25 poll. He routinely flipped the field with his jaw-dropping punts and set an NCAA record with a 51.19-yard average. He won the Ray Guy Award and was a first-team AP All-American.

“We were recently made aware of a

civil complaint involving Matt from October 2021,” the Bills said in a statement. “Due to the serious nature of the complaint, we conducted a thorough examination of this matter. As this is an ongoing civil case, we will have no other comment at this point.”

The Bills traveled to Carolina for their exhibition finale at the Panthers on Friday night. It’s unclear whether Araiza will play against the Panthers, though the Bills have no other punter on their roster. Haack has since signed with the Indianapolis Colts.

Emma Raducanu plays down injury fears in buildup to US Open defence

Tumaini Carayol in New York

Emma Raducanu has played down any fears of an injury during her final days of preparation for her US Open title defence despite an emotional training session on Friday afternoon as she appeared to struggle with an ailment on her hand. Two hours later, in her pre-tournament press conference, Raducanu attributed her struggles to blisters and a bad day at the office.

“I had a few small things, got a couple blisters, a bit of a niggle here and there,” said Raducanu. “It’s just one of those weird days where you feel a bit like nothing ... I don’t know. You just feel a bit out of it. Can’t really explain myself, to be honest. I’m sure everyone in this room has probably had a day like that. Yeah, it is what it is.”

Having scheduled a two hour practice session with Ekaterina Alexandrova, after around 40 minutes Raducanu stopped the training session, moving to the side of the court where she was in tears as she spoke with her coach, Dmitry Tursunov.

Raducanu resumed the practice but she continued to fiddle with her hand, prompting her to exit the court for a lengthier period with her physio, Will Herbert. During her absence, Tursunov kept the training session moving by hit-



▲ Emma Raducanu pauses her training session due to a couple of blisters on her hand. Photograph: Javier García/Shutterstock

ting with Alexandrova.

Despite the short interlude, Raducanu returned after a short period afterwards and continued the lengthy two hour session without further issues, playing points with Alexandrova and serving at full speed until the end. Afterwards, Raducanu said that she has no issues to report. “I have no concerns of, like, an issue, no,” she said.

Raducanu’s title defence will begin with a challenging opener as she faces a tough first round match against the veteran Frenchwoman Alizé Cornet, who has already beaten Iga Swiatek, Simona Halep, Garbiñe Muguruza and Jelena Ostapenko across the three prior grand

slam tournaments this year. They will battle on Louis Armstrong Stadium at 7pm during the night session.

But Raducanu will take heart from her preparation after dismantling the former world No 1s Serena Williams and Victoria Azarenka in succession before falling in two tight sets.

Raducanu said that she had committed to swinging freely and attacking, a mentality that will be tested significantly by the gritty defence of Cornet and the long rallies she will hope to provoke.

As has become a customary occurrence in Raducanu’s press conferences, another question about feeling pres-

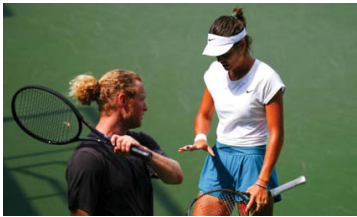
sure as she prepares to defend her title provoked a hint of irritation. “I think you guys are probably thinking more about pressure and ranking than me,” she said. “I think defending a title is just something that the press makes up. I’m just taking it one match at a time. Like, every single player is very capable in this draw. I just focus on what I’m doing, my own trajectory.”

After being ranked 150th, playing in the qualifying draw and initially only having the interest of a small group of British reporters, Raducanu returns to New York as the 11th seed and with a slightly more bulging purse.

On Friday, Forbes listed Raducanu as the sixth highest earner in tennis over the past year, with estimated earnings of \$21.1 million. Raducanu says that the biggest change in her life over the past year is the amount of people around her at all times.

“Before I could do whatever I wanted, be left to it,” she says. “I think that now more so, like, there’s a lot of people around me at all times. It’s something that just comes with what I do. Yeah, I think I adjusted to it throughout the year. But it’s part of the sport, part of what I do.”

As one recent grand slam champion reckoned with the consequences of their life-changing achievement, on Friday another expressed her fru-



▲ Raducanu reacts to an injury niggle with her coach Dmitry Tursunov. Photograph: Javier García/Shutterstock

stration at how little things have changed since winning Wimbledon. Since Wimbledon carried no points after the WTA chose to remove ranking points from the event in response to Wimbledon’s decision to ban Russian and Belarusian players, Elena Rybakina has actually fallen in the rankings since winning one of the biggest tournaments in the world and she questioned the low court assignments she still receives.

“I would say if you go to play tournament. Me, as a Wimbledon champion, have to feel like, yes, now attention is on me, and I’m playing good. It was good. For example, in one tournament I go and play against the greatest champion, Muguruza, and we play on Court No. 4. This is kind of like a question for me. I don’t think that this is fair. Just my opinion,” she said.

Ben Foakes hails Ben Stokes for ‘taking the pressure off’ against South Africa

Tanya Aldred at Emirates Old Trafford

Ben Foakes praised Ben Stokes for taking the pressure off during their astute partnership of 173 during the second day of the second Test against South Africa, and for giving him permission to be dull. “Don’t do anything stupid,” Stokes told him as they faced down the steaming Anrich Nortje.

Both Bens carved brilliant hundreds with extra meaning as they took England from an uneasy position against South Africa to a dominant one. Stokes’s 103 was his first as Test captain and on the very day his documentary Phoenix from the Ashes was released.



▲ Ben Foakes (left) and Ben Stokes during their 173 partnership on day two of the second Test against South Africa. Photograph: Matt West/Shutterstock

Foakes’s unbeaten 113 was his first Test hundred at home.

“Ben was quite clear,” said Foakes. “We can absorb as well, this is a difficult phase, let’s make it hard for them, score where you can, be busy but don’t do anything stupid.”

“The opportunity to bat for a long period of time, and stay out there was fantastic and then ... with the state of the game trying to extend that lead put us in a really strong position.

“That’s what you enjoy, being able to contribute to a key phase of the game, and he’s a great guy to do it with. He takes the pressure off you and when he went from 50 to 100 he kind of raced away and put it back on them and let me just bat, which was awesome. He’s got a few good things going on in his life, everyone wants a piece of him. The

way he played was pretty special.”

Foakes’s fledgling Test career has been littered with bad luck and mishaps, from coming up against the brick wall of the Jonny Bairstow-Jos Buttler wicketkeeping axis, to loss of form, falling out of love with the game, slipping in the dressing room in his socks and tearing his hamstring, and catching Covid in June. His second Test hundred came nearly four years after his first – against Sri Lanka at Galle on his Test debut – but in only his 16th Test.

“There was just a sense of relief,” he said. “Since my first game I’ve found hundreds aren’t easy to come by in Test cricket so this one for me is very, very special.”

‘I want to leave’: Antony speaks out after Ajax reject Man Utd’s £76.3m bid

Jamie Jackson and Fabrizio Romano

Manchester United had a bid of €90m (£76.3m) for Antony rejected by Ajax on Friday, with the Dutch club wanting a higher price for the forward.

Ajax had in recent days turned down an €80m United offer for the 22-year-old. The Brazil international, who played under Erik ten Hag at Ajax, is keen to join United and is understood to be disappointed that his club did not accept Friday's bid. He reiterated to Ajax on Friday his desire to make the move.

"Since February of this year, my agents came to Amsterdam to inform Ajax of my desire to leave the club to face new challenge and that some interested clubs would arrive and with them, certainly a great offer," the player said. "During the window months, meetings continued and I also received a pro-



▲ Antony celebrates after scoring for Ajax against Groningen this month. Photograph: Maurice van Steen/EPA

posal from Ajax for contract renewal. I made it clear once again: I want to leave.

"I was very happy in Amsterdam, I won titles at Ajax, made friends and built part of my career, but now I reinforce that I am ready and full of motivation to follow my story and my dreams. People need to listen to me and understand that my motivation moves me towards happiness. I need this to continue performing at a high level. Ajax will always be in my heart."

Speaking before news of the rejected bid emerged Ten Hag said: "We need players, clear, but we need the right players. The whole transfer window, we are happy with what we did until now but the bar has to be high [for any signing]."

The manager has added Christian Eriksen, Lisandro Martínez, Casemiro and Tyrell Malacia since leaving Ajax for Old Trafford in May.

Chelsea and Leicester near agreement on Wesley Fofana after new £75m bid

Ben Fisher and Fabrizio Romano

Chelsea are nearing a full agreement with Leicester City for the transfer of Wesley Fofana, with the Midlands club entertaining a fourth bid of around £75m for the defender.

Personal terms with Chelsea have long been arranged with the Frenchman, although the London club have not finalised any add-ons with their opponents on Saturday.

Brendan Rodgers said Wesley Fofana will not be involved against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge on Saturday as the defender continues to train with Leicester's under-23s. Rodgers said the situation with Fofana was "totally different" from when Leicester sanctioned Harry Maguire's sale to Manchester United for £80m.

Rodgers said he would consider bringing back Fofana when the 21-year-old centre-back was "ready to commit to the team." Fofana did not turn up for one training session last week and trained alone during another. He is



▲ Brendan Rodgers has said Wesley Fofana will not feature against Chelsea on Saturday, with the defender not currently training with the Leicester first team. Photograph: Adrian Dennis/AFP/Getty

the summer that there was a possibility that could happen and in fairness to Harry, in terms of his behaviour and his focus for the club, [he] was fantastic right until the last minute that he was with the team and the squad and then he moved on. So, no, it is different. Obviously in a few of my seasons here we've lost Ben Chilwell as well but this unfortunately is a little bit different. But our focus is with the team and the players that are available."

Rodgers reiterated that players must depart if he is to strengthen before the transfer window closes on Thursday. "[We're] probably looking at a few players at least [leaving] to try and allow us to do some business to bring some in," he said. "That's been the model of the club in terms of a player moving on and releasing funds to bring in other players."

Rodgers said he would not get downbeat despite Leicester being without a victory other than on penalties at Stockport County in the Carabao Cup. "I'm one of the last people who will lose my optimism," the manager said.

understood to be keen on joining Chelsea.

Asked whether there were similarities to when Maguire was sold in 2019, Rodgers replied: "It was totally different. I was aware over the course of

Anthony Gordon to Chelsea: the extreme concept that captures grotesque industry

Barney Ronay

There are generally five stages to a failed high-profile football transfer, those signings that are so grandly dysfunctional they become a kind of theatre in themselves, disaster-content, almost perversely, a success.

Finding the most rewarding ways to describe Romelu Lukaku's return to Chelsea, essentiality a Belgian man walking around looking bemused while other people play football nearby, has provided more heat, light and work hours than a bog-standard success story. To the extent Lukaku himself seems somehow elevated by it, imbued

with another layer of celebrity grace. Those five stages are probably best defined as: excitement, denial, blame, grief and finally acceptance. Early signs of failure furiously denied. Scapegoats will be hoist, post-truth statistics used to suggest that this is in fact all a great success. Finally, as the cycle moves on and other causes become more

urgent, we enter the world of parody and meme, an iconography of acceptance, a kind of shared healing via double-Spider-man, winking Ronaldo, Mourinho taking off his headphones. The most striking part of Anthony Gordon's proposed transfer to Chelsea is how quickly - despite not existing - it has already progressed to

this final stage. Gordon to Chelsea for £60m: this probably won't happen. But already mocking Anthony Gordon, laughing hysterically at his disastrous gambit, circulating clips of his failures, his paltry tally of deflected goals has become a kind of online happening.

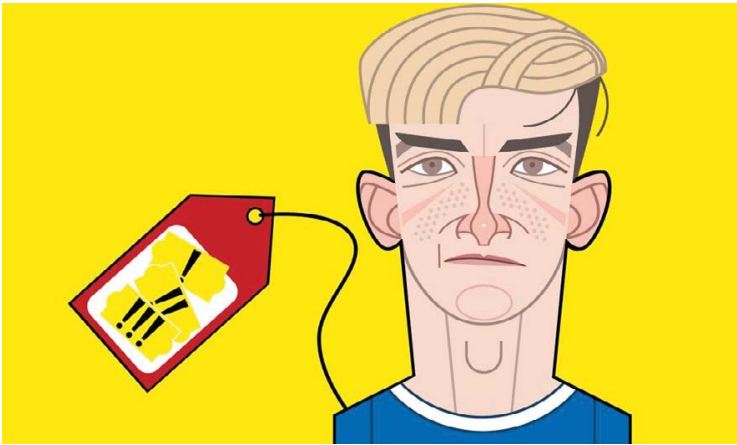
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The American novelist Don DeLillo has a character in one of his books who has a network of CCTV security cameras, and who starts realising that the sequencing is wrong, that things are happening on the screen before they happen in real life. This is how the Gordon transfer disaster feels. Do we actually need the football here? Do we need the long-form version, Gordon on the bench looking cold in a beanie hat, a much-mocked missed open goal, the Newcastle rumours? At what stage will content, eyeballs, reaction become all that matter? Can we save time by simulating all this using AI, or at the very least reducing it to a high-production musical montage?

And yet, of course, it does matter. Or at least, this one feels like it does. Gordon to Chelsea for £60m is such an extreme concept it is already causing harm simply by not happening. This is a nonexistent transfer that seems to capture so much that is transgressive about this industry, from the stupid money of English football, to the dislocation of how clubs should work, to the violent things football wants to do to the young people in its grip.

The first thing to say is that it may work out. Gordon is a late bloomer.



▲ *‘The fee being suggested for Anthony Gordon would be the third-biggest in Bundesliga history, the eighth-biggest in Real Madrid’s history.’ Illustration: David Lyttleton*

He has a way of turning quickly with the ball, beating the press while scanning all the moving parts around him, that analysts at clubs such as Chelsea prize very highly. Also, it is only really the fee that makes this absurd. He shares an agent with Reece James. Chelsea need to manage their home-grown squad numbers. Why not?

But it is still nuts on a basic football level. Chelsea already have seven players in Gordon’s inside-forward position, all of whom are probably better at it. Chelsea no longer have an endless bank-of-dad loan fund. The fee being suggested for Gordon would be

the third-biggest transfer in Bundesliga history, the eighth-biggest fee in Real Madrid’s history. Todd Boehly’s reputation is built on aggressive deal-making. Todd Boehly looks like he invented an electric car in the 1980s. But Todd Boehly is also a maverick billionaire and you’re not. Perhaps this signing is simply making a statement. The problem is that statement appears to be: I don’t know what I’m doing.

Does any of this matter? Inflated transfer fees are an everyday occurrence. But the thing about this one is its layers, the way the more you peel it, the more it stinks. History suggests

this will be not be good for Gordon. For a player in a development stage he is in exactly the right place. He will play and improve. Moving to Chelsea will threaten this. This is how the story goes. Fine young players miss the chance to reach their ultimate ceiling. Fortunes are made. But the game as a whole is poorer for the talent-stockpiling model. Anthony Gordon at Everton playing every week, with desperation in his scurrying legs: this is a kind of poetry, the spectacle as it should be. Money will no longer allow it.

It is also bad for Everton. There is an idea this money might be “invested”, but far greater sums have already gurgled away down the waste disposal unit. Even if Gordon stays, Everton will have had five league matches with this noise buzzing around their best young player. And in the end the real question Gordon to Chelsea raises is the most basic one: what is the point these days of Everton football club? Is it to compete, to strive through smart moves and homegrown talent to match the top tier? Or simply to service those entities, to exist as a backdrop?

The top clubs have literally introduced this concept into the business plan for reform of the Champions League, the idea signings will come only from the lower orders, the path-



▲ *Anthony Gordon protests at a challenge by Joe Worrall during Everton’s draw against Nottingham Forest. Photograph: Naomi Baker/Getty Images*

way clubs. Yes, we will take what you have. But remember to leave by the side entrance.

At some point this will start to look unavoidably grotesque. Premier League clubs have already broken their own record for summer spending, are still out there operating with no controls, hiding as ever behind “the market”. And in the end this is real money, or it is now: your TV subscription, your ticket price, money that might help keep the lights on or put food in the fridge this winter. Gordon to Chelsea for £60m. This probably won’t happen. But there is an end point to all things, a state beyond simply acceptance, distraction, a weary shrug. It can’t be that far off.

Harry Maguire not guaranteed return to Manchester United team, says Ten Hag

Jamie Jackson

Erik ten Hag has said Harry Maguire’s status as captain offers no guarantee of a return to the team, especially as the manager has the “immense” Raphaël Varane in his squad.

Maguire was dropped in favour of the Frenchman for Monday’s 2-1 win over Liverpool and Varane impressed in central defence with Lisandro Martínez. United are at Southampton for Saturday’s early kick-off and Ten Hag was asked whether the captain not playing was awkward.

“Yeah but I think that doesn’t mean when you are captain you are established to always play,” he said. “Especially when you also have Varane in your squad. We have options. Varane: his stature is immense and in pre-season we took a decision to build him physically so he had a bit of a slow start. He was fit in the first games but in the first period of pre-season he wasn’t always so we are happy we built him in that way.”

Varane has won the World Cup with France and four Champions Leagues and two La Liga titles with Real Madrid.



▲ *Erik ten Hag said Harry Maguire was one of a ‘leader group’ at Manchester United. Photograph: Matthew Ashton/AMA/Getty Images*

“You see when the team needed him he was really there [against Liverpool] and his profile, his stature and what he won already in the past shows he can really contribute to his team,” Ten Hag said. “For the team there is competition, and

we need that. We have to cover so many games and we can do that in several constructions. We can see from game to game what we need.”

Bruno Fernandes captained United against Liverpool. Ten Hag shrugged off

whether he may make the Portuguese his official leader if Maguire continues to be left out.

“I am not looking so far – we are only one game [like this],” he said. “We have a leader group and Harry is one of them,

Bruno is one of them. Bruno did quite well as captain. He led by example and he brings so much energy to the team in and out of possession.”

United’s goals against Liverpool were scored by Jadon Sancho and Marcus Rashford. Ten Hag said: “I was really happy that they scored because I hope that it will give them the push so that they can do the hard work and contribute in defending and pressing but also contribute to creating and taking chances and that is what they are really good at. It’s about when they believe that they will do it.”

Ten Hag may give Casemiro his debut at Southampton. The Brazilian’s transfer from Madrid was a surprise, particularly as it was completed quickly. “We have a list – he was always on it but we didn’t know he would become available,” Ten Hag said. “In the moment that we got signals, we got proactive and we got it done and we are really happy about that. The intention always has to be for Man United to look for better. So good is not good enough, always go for better.”

Brendan Rodgers not losing sleep over threat of sack despite Leicester woes

Ben Fisher

Leicester are in a peculiar place; a strange stasis whereby they are des-

perate not to sell their best players but are acutely aware that without doing so they risk a season of stagnation; an awkward spot where the squad is undeniably weaker than the one that

finished eighth in an ultimately disappointing last campaign; an unforgiving world in which a winless start means it is easy to feel as if the walls are caving in at the King Power Stadium. And a

situation where supporters – even if only a minority – are happy to join opposition fans in sarcastically chanting about the manager, who led the team to a European semi-final at the

Stadio Olimpico in May and to lifting the FA Cup for the first time 12 months earlier, being sacked in the morning.

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At least Brendan Rodgers was able to grin and bear it when those songs from the stands at Edgeley Park, where Leicester squeezed past Stockport on penalties in the Carabao Cup second round on Tuesday, were put to him this week.

"Not for the first time," smiles Rodgers, for whom the past couple of months have resembled an industrial-size game of Whac-A-Mole: Wesley Fofana effectively downing tools amid several bids from Chelsea; Newcastle trying it on a little in pursuit of James Maddison; Ricardo Pereira's ruptured achilles; Kasper Schmeichel's untimely exit days before the season; the planned arrival of a specialist set-piece coach delayed by Brexit red tape. And what about Youri Tielemans, who is free to sign a pre-contract agreement in January?

Last week Rodgers, who has repeatedly outlined his desire to disrupt the top six, reiterated that standing still does not interest him. But first he must make sure Leicester do not go backwards. This season may be only 360 minutes old but does he feel under pressure before taking his team to Chelsea on Saturday?

"I'm feeling the want to get the result," he says. "I look back over my time here, over three and a half years, and we've spent about £25m net per



▲ 'My energy is with the players,' says Brendan Rodgers (second from left) as he watches Leicester train. Photograph: Plumb Images/Leicester City/Getty Images

season, and that's got us to where we've got to in terms of challenging at the top end of the table, winning a couple of trophies and getting to a European semi-final. What I hope as a manager is to continue with that ambition. If I'm unable to do that and the club decide it needs to go in a different direction, that's the way it is. That's football and that's management.

"I don't lose sleep over it. My energy is with the players and the people here. I'm in here early in the morning until late at night, trying to find solutions and the best way forward. For a lot of the time, we have managed to do that well for a club of this size. But I think what's definitely happened is that the expectation is not aligned with our fin-

ances in terms of where we should be competing. It doesn't make us any less ambitious. For me, it's a continuation of that; we're always fighting. I'm experienced now to know that if you don't get the results, you can come under pressure."

Chelsea's interest in Fofana has developed into an unhelpful saga that Rodgers does not want to destabilise his squad, leading him to making the 21-year-old train with the under-23s. The situation should at least be resolved soon with a deal for the player nearing agreement after a fourth bid of around £75m was lodged by Chelsea on Friday.

"I've got experience of this situation and in my time here I've never really had to operate in this way before,"

Rodgers says, alluding to Harry Maguire's sale in 2019. "When it can become a distraction and when it has an effect on the collective, then I have to make a decision. Thankfully, it hasn't because the players have been superb in their training mentality. They understand the situation and understand it from the club's and the player's perspective."

Rodgers has spoken of his reluctance to "kill my board" when discussing the dearth of incomings - Alex Smithies, a free agent acquired as a third-choice goalkeeper, represents the only signing - but targets such as Ademola Lookman, who spent last season on loan at his club, have moved elsewhere. Unless rival clubs reach players' valuations, Leicester are stuck with what they've got. "Normally at this stage of the season there's excitement around a club and a team because of the new players that are in," the manager says. "The board and people who run the club are looking after the future of the club and you can't disregard that. Every squad needs regenerating and that's something we know needs to happen. Time is ticking away but there's a lot of hard work going on."

Maddison is an injury doubt after feeling a twinge in training and positive news is scarce. Rodgers sympathises with the fans: "I can only imagine for the supporters that the club feels like a ball of frustration at the moment. If



▲ Wesley Fofana is currently training with the under-23s amid transfer speculation around his future. Photograph: Craig Brough/Reuters

there's anyone to take it out on, it's normally the manager. I'm responsible for results and performances."

Leicester have played only three league matches but each contained ominous signs: they threw away a two-goal lead on the opening day to draw with Brentford, were outclassed at Arsenal and squandered another lead in a defeat by Southampton. In midweek a strong but much-changed side failed to score against a Stockport defence with League Two's joint-worst record. Rodgers has been disappointed with the way his team have regressed after leading and knows they will have to deliver a complete performance to have a chance of winning at Stamford Bridge. "It is about maintaining intensity," he says. "For me that is when this team is at their very best and it is about getting back those basic factors."

Jürgen Klopp 'gets things off chest' in Liverpool squad meeting after poor start

Andy Hunter

Jürgen Klopp has demanded more effort and passion from his Liverpool players after "getting things off my chest" during a lengthy inquest into their poor start.

The Liverpool manager convened a meeting with his squad on Wednesday in response to Monday's 2-1 defeat at Manchester United - they had the day off on Tuesday - and admits it was a one-way conversation. He believes Liverpool must react on Saturday at home to Bournemouth, in a game he described as "the first proper fightback early in the season".

Klopp said: "There was no discussion. I was getting things off my chest. The good thing about this meeting is I feel much better after it. It is not that I shout at the players, not at all, it is about putting things in perspective - what we did well and didn't do well. We live in a world where always everything is judged but in the end only one thing is important and that is what we think ourselves about it.

"For us and for me it is clear what we have to do. I cannot go into detail



▲ Jürgen Klopp said: 'It is not that I shout at the players, not at all, it is about putting things in perspective.' Photograph: John Powell/Liverpool FC/Getty Images

but of course we talk about pretty much everything, especially the important things for us, and try to exclude the not so important stuff. I got washed with all kinds of water in my life, highs

and lows, and it is all about how you deal with it. It was a bit of a longer meeting - these kind of meetings always are - and afterwards I felt better."

Klopp pinpointed aspects of Liver-

pool's game that have been lacking during a winless start to the Premier League campaign. "We have to improve and what you can improve immediately is effort," he said. "I'm not sure but let

me say it was maybe 95%. In the world of football we are living in you need 100%, if not a little bit more. And passion."

Klopp has admitted he was mistaken to rule out signing a midfielder earlier this summer, especially in light of the injuries that have subsequently struck, but reiterated that only the availability of the right target would prompt Liverpool to move before Thursday's deadline.

"We have had this discussion since it all started and I am the one who said: 'We don't need a midfielder,' and you were all right and I was wrong," he said. "But the specific point doesn't change - we will do something but it has to be the right one.

"Curtis [Jones] comes back, Thiago [Alcântara] not too far off, Diogo [Jota] not too far off, Joël [Matip] comes back and that all eases the situation slightly. It would be great if no one gets on the [injury] list on the other side with a really intense time coming up. We are looking for it and if it is the right player we need him and if it is not the right player we don't need him."

The only thing that should influence the news is the news

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European roundup: Pedro helps Lazio go top; Lille bounce back

Reuters

Lazio's Felipe Anderson, Luis Alberto and Pedro secured a 3-1 home victory over Internazionale that took their side top of Serie A on Friday as the visitors dropped their first points of the season on coach Simone Inzaghi's return to his old club. Lazio had two great chances through their captain Ciro Immobile and a third from striker Mattia Zaccagni before Anderson, who had been perfectly set up by Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, put the hosts ahead with a 40th-minute header at the Stadio Olimpico.

The visitors equalised from a free-kick as the defender Denzel Dumfries nodded the ball to the unmarked Lautaro Martínez who netted from close range in the 51st minute. A minute later, Inter went close to taking the lead when Dumfries got his head to Federico Dimarco's high cross and sent the ball bouncing off the ground just in front of the Lazio goalkeeper Ivan Provedel, who managed to tip it over the bar.



▲ Pedro celebrates after scoring Lazio's third goal in the 3-1 victory over Inter in Rome. Photograph: Federico Proietti/DPPI/Shutterstock

However, the substitute Luis Alberto restored the lead for Lazio with a sublime strike from distance in the 75th minute, and Pedro made it 3-1 four minutes from time.

"We've been sending some good signals lately, as we go through periods of being under pressure without actually risking much at the back," the Lazio

coach Maurizio Sarri said afterwards. "This team has gained in solidity and organisation, so we are capable of beating anyone on the day, but our problem has always been consistency."

"The defeat stings because of the way it happened," Inter's coach Simone Inzaghi said. "Luis Alberto's goal broke the game. At 1-1 we had Dum-

fries' chance that would have changed things."

Lazio are provisionally top with seven points from three games, with Inter a point behind in fourth place. In the early-evening game Udinese beat the bottom side Monza 2-1. The hosts took the lead on 32 minutes through Andrea Colpani's goal but Beto soon equalised for Udinese and the Spurs loanee Destiny Udogie sealed the points with 13 minutes left.

Lille bounced back from a humiliating 7-1 thumping by Paris St Germain last weekend with a 3-1 win at newly promoted Ajaccio on Friday – their second win of the Ligue 1 season. Yusuf Yazici's breathtaking volley gave the visitors a 17th-minute lead, and that was followed by strikes for Jonathan Bamba near half-time and the defender Tiago Djalo midway through the second period.

Jonathan David hit the post with a late penalty to deny Lille a fourth goal after Cyrille Bayala had pulled one back for Ajaccio when Lille failed to clear a



▲ Lille's Jonathan Bamba doubles his side's lead over Ajaccio. Photograph: Pascal Pochard-Casabianca/AFP/Getty Images

corner six minutes from time. Lille are fourth with seven points, two behind leaders PSG who host AS Monaco on Sunday, while Ajaccio are third-bottom on one point and still looking for a first victory.

In Spain's La Liga there were 1-0 wins for Celta Vigo at Girona and for 10-man Real Betis at home to Osasuna. In the Bundesliga, Freiburg beat Bochum 1-0, leaving the visitors bottom of the table with no points after four games.

'The focus has to be there': outgoing Alli warned by Lampard over training

Andy Hunter

Frank Lampard has warned Dele Alli risks wasting his career at the highest level unless he rediscovers the focus that made him a World Cup semi-finalist with England four years ago.

Alli joined Besiktas on a season's loan on Thursday seven months after leaving Tottenham for Everton. He moved from Spurs in an unorthodox deal under which Everton agreed to pay an initial £10m after 20 appearances, but even that modest target has not been reached. The 26-year-old, an England regular at the last World Cup and the Professional Footballers' Association's young player of the year in 2016 and 2017, has moved on after featuring only 13 times for Lampard's team, 12 of those as a substitute.

In echoes of José Mourinho's warning from 2020 that Alli would regret not demanding more of himself, the Everton manager claimed the playmaker's downward spiral was linked to his approach to training.

Lampard, who admits taking a calculated risk when signing Alli on deadline day in January, said: "I do have great empathy for the trajectory of his career in a sense because it is clear to



▲ Dele Alli in Istanbul, where he has joined Besiktas on loan. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

see. I don't have to dress that up in any way.

"Having worked closely with him for a period I have to say he really does need to understand the relation of training and focus to what that means to performance at the highest level. It's not just the Dele story, I would say that to any player because it's the only thing I know. I wasn't a saint, but I know what training can do and focus can do, and that's something he really has to take on board. If he can, it can be not just a great thing for him but for the teammates around him in the squad. He's at

that point. That is the test for him now."

Alli will have a year remaining on his Everton contract should Besiktas decline options to sign him for £6m before 1 January or £8m after that until June. Lampard believes Alli's elite-level career will be in jeopardy without a change of attitude.

"He has to do it. Every player has to do it. This sport is too elite at the top end. If you want to be in that bracket, or be influential at a club like Everton or Tottenham, or anywhere. It is just too elite. Every player has to have a version of what is best for them and what gets

the most out of them. Not every player will do the amount of training that a certain player does, but the focus has to be there and if you don't have it, it is really, really tough."

Everton have completed the signing of the Brighton forward Neal Maupay for an undisclosed fee, thought to be in the region of £15m. The 26-year-old underwent a medical on Friday, and has signed a three-year deal with an option of a further year.

"Everton is a great club with unbelievable fans and I am so, so happy to be here," said Maupay. "It was an easy choice for me when I started to talk with the club. I knew straight away I wanted to play for Everton and help the club to succeed. I'm excited and it's a new challenge for me. I will do everything I can for Everton. That's what the fans want – they want players that are ready to give their best, and ready to fight."

Meanwhile, Lampard insists he is under no pressure to sell Anthony Gordon to fund incomings. The manager has set his own "red line" date for Chelsea to complete a deal for the England Under-21s international and rejected claims that an offer worth up to £60m had been made. Unless Everton's valuation is met in the coming days,



▲ Anthony Gordon will remain at Everton unless the club's valuation is met, Frank Lampard said. Photograph: Emma Simpson/Everton FC/Getty Images

and before Thursday's official deadline, Gordon will stay.

"It is absolutely not happening at this point and that is where we are at," said Lampard. "I have got respect for Chelsea because I did play for them but my biggest job now is to have an understanding of what I need to do here and the situation we are in is that Anthony is not leaving this club."

He added: "We have drawn a red line. I won't say where it is but I am getting very close to it. It is my job to put the best squad together so there absolutely has to come a time where we understand what the squad is going to be. Especially with a player of the level of Anthony, I have to know he is going to be here and the good thing is myself and everybody involved upstairs has the same kind of thinking."

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